

How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord: Volume 3

Yukiya Murasaki

VISIT...

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The cover features a blonde demon girl with long, flowing hair and large, curved horns. She is wearing a dark, ruffled outfit with purple accents and is bound by several chains. The background is a light green with faint, stylized patterns. The title is written in a mix of purple, red, and green fonts, with the word 'A' being small and flanked by chain links.

HOW NOT TO SUMMON A DEMON LORD

VOLUME

3

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Illust. Takahiro Tsurusaki

—It was a colossus wreathed in armor. This was the true form of the Demon Lord, Krebskulm.



The girls reacted at the same time:

For the time being, Diablo kept his back turned to them. The only things he could hear were the gentle flow of the river and the sound of the girls talking.

"I DON'T
STINK!"

"I DO NOT
SMELL!"

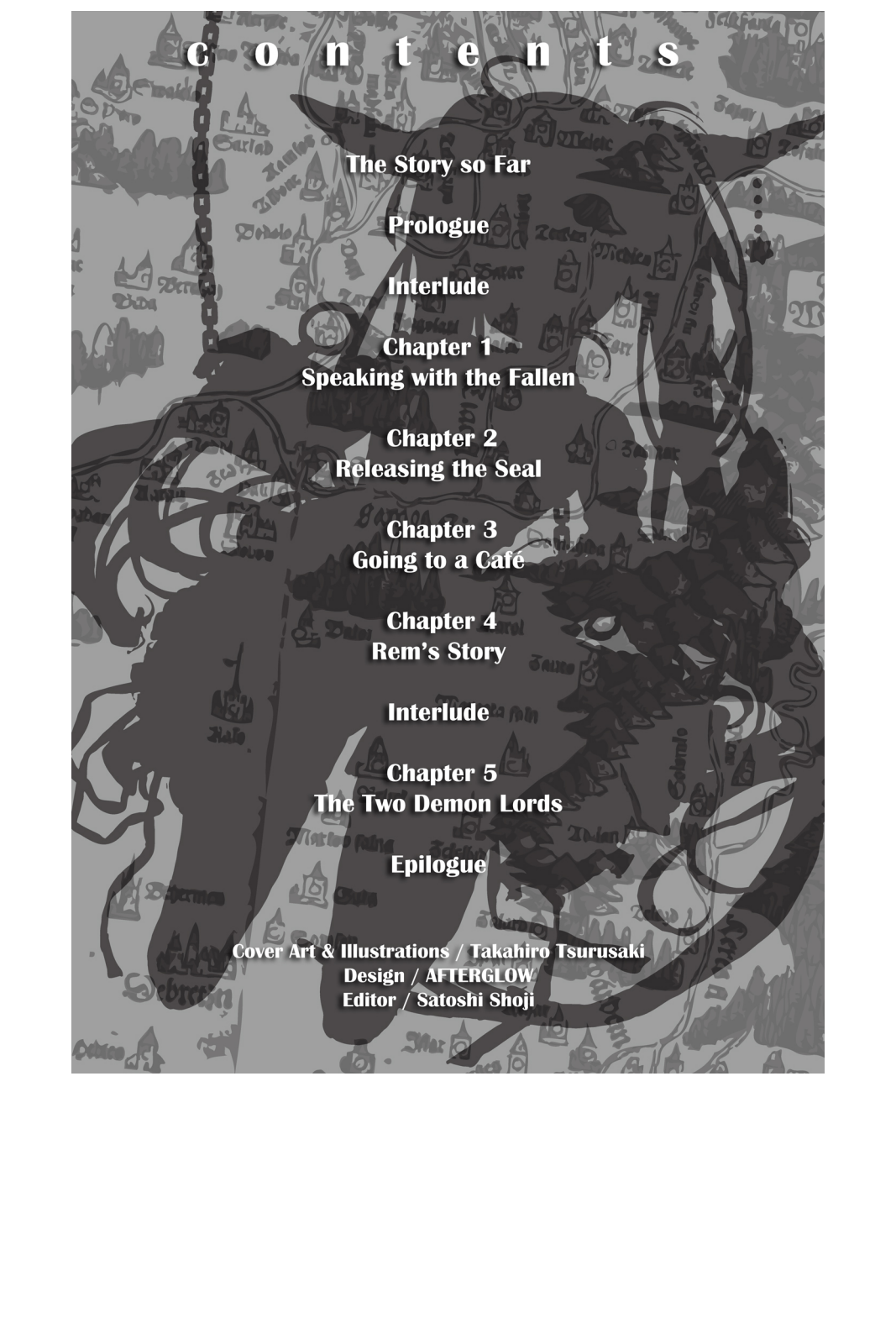




"HYAAN!
AHN!
AHHHH!
NGHHH!
IT'S HOT!
DIABLO...
I CAN'T...
MMGH! THIS
IS... GOING
TO DRIVE ME
CRAZY...!
MNN!"

"NGH..."

c o n t e n t s



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The Story So Far—

In the MMORPG Cross Reverie, Takuma Sakamoto was overwhelmingly powerful, and was able to role-play so well that his performances were more boss-like than the actual bosses of the game. For this reason, he came to be known as the “Demon Lord.”

By defeating the 《Demon Lord of the Mind, Enkvaros》 faster than anyone else, he obtained the super rare item, the 《Demon Lord’s Ring》. It was one of the ultimate pieces of equipment in the game, able to reflect all types of magic.

Then, one day—Takuma found himself summoned to a world that looked exactly like Cross Reverie! Having performed the ritual magic at the same time, the Pantherian, Rem, and the Elf, Shera, fought over which one of them was his Summoner:

“...I am the one who summoned him. Your magic was a failure.”

“You’re wrong! He’s mine!”

But thanks to the Demon Lord’s Ring he wore, the magic was reflected—the 《Enslavement Collar》 meant for him had clamped onto the two girls instead!

Faced with Rem and Shera arguing, Takuma was at a loss of what to do. While he may have been a superior player back in the game, he couldn’t talk with other people if his life depended on it. After struggling over what to say, the words that came out of his mouth were from the Demon Lord role-play he had used in the game:

“Cease your pointless squabbling. You are in the presence of Diablo.”

Traveling to the town of Faltra, the three of them found lodging at an inn. There, they were paid a visit from Celes, the Head of the Mage’s Association, and a very important figure in this town. It seemed that Rem was in possession of a grave secret: Within her body was sealed the soul of the 《Demon Lord Krebskult》.

Rem despaired that no one would be able to help her... That’s when Diablo made this declaration to her:

“Leave everything to me. No matter your circumstances, a Demon Lord will be able to accept it all.”

The next day, Diablo and the others became full-fledged Adventurers. Their first quest turned out to be a trap, and they were attacked by a squadron of elite Elf soldiers trying to capture Shera. It turned out she was the princess of the Kingdom of Greenwood!

But Diablo repelled the attack with ease—the gap between their levels was just too great. This was the moment Diablo came to

understand the difference between Cross Reverie, a game with infinite revives, and this world, where death was permanent.

The next day, the Fallen named Edelgard lead an army of one hundred of her brethren in an attack on the Bridge of Ulug. At the same time, a powerful Fallen appeared in the middle of Faltra.

Showing off his true power, Diablo completely routed Edelgard and her army. Using a “Return” spell, he makes his way back to Faltra instantaneously, and in an overwhelming display of magic, Diablo destroyed Gregore, the tenacious Fallen who had been terrorizing the town. Thanks to his efforts, he saved Rem, Celes, and the entire city of Faltra.

Diablo later found himself the recipient of a quest from the governor of Faltra, Galford. The Kingdom of Greenwood had demanded Shera be returned to them, or else they would declare open war with Faltra. The details of Galford’s quest were as follows: “If you do not wish to hand over Shera, then find a way to avoid this war.”

The bespectacled, straight-and-narrow Imperial Knight Alicia was assigned to the group as an observer to watch over their actions, as Diablo struggled to find a solution to this predicament... But due to the plans put in motion by Keera, the prince of Greenwood, Shera was put under his control and forced to say she would return to her homeland.

Being conversationally impaired and faint of heart, Diablo allowed Shera to be abducted... But after being persuaded by Rem, Diablo managed to return to his normal self. Crushing the Elf soldiers in his way, Diablo and the others pushed toward Keera’s encampment. In a panic, the prince flees, only to be cut down by the governor of Faltra himself—Galford. He had bided his time, waiting for Diablo to become exhausted fighting so he could seize the opportunity and capture Shera.

Diablo fought a hard and grueling battle against Galford. Though it came close, it was Diablo’s superior experience fighting against others that led him to victory. Though they had been through a lot, peaceful days had finally returned once again...

Prologue

Located at the western edge of the Kingdom of Lyferia could be found the front-lines of the races—the Stronghold City of Faltra. A sprawl of steep mountain ranges could be found to its north, while the south contained the vast Seplia Lake. The expansive forest that spread along the eastern side of this lake was called the 《Eastern Lakefront Forest》. This forest was located southeast of the city of Faltra. Unlike the much more dangerous west side, this location still fell under the territory of the races. The chance of running into monsters or Fallen was slim, with rarely any appearances from large wild beasts.

In this world, it was a place used regularly for hunting by the townspeople. In the game, however, it was a place for players who had finally managed to arrive at Faltra to grind out levels and experience.

Lyferian Calendar: Month 6, Day 8, Year 164—

Diablo and the others arrived at the Eastern Lakefront Forest. It had been a week since he fought the Elves and Galford nearby. Diablo had made a complete recovery since then, both physically and in terms of his MP.

Beams of sunlight streamed through the spaces in the trees; birds were chirping; the air was filled with the smell of grass and earth.

Diablo stood with his back leaned up against a tree, staring at Rem and Shera. Shera was drawing something in the white sand on the ground.

“Is this all right?”

“...It’s a bit messy... But since this is your first one, we’ll say it’s fine.” Though she was frowning, Rem still gave her approval.

“Oh, you.” Shera waved her hand in front of her face dismissively. “This isn’t my first time! Diablo was my first Summon, so this will be my second one.”

“...I was the one who drew the summoning circle back then,” Rem sighed.

Rem Galleu was a small, lithe Pantherian girl. The panther ears on her head, the long tail she sported, and the hair that extended down to her waist were all a glossy black color. Normally, Pantherians had orange hair and amber-colored tails, but Rem was different. She was

one of the rare few Pantherians who boasted black fur. She also sported an Enslavement Collar wrapped around her neck.

Her face, while still youthful in appearance, was a stunning sight to behold as well. Her slanted, cat-like eyes and tightly drawn lips worked to show the strength of her will. She was giving instructions to Shera, a fledgling Summoner herself.

Shera L. Greenwood was an Elf who was endowed with long, well-proportioned arms and legs, and a slender body. Her hair was the color of melted gold, while her eyes were a cerulean blue that matched the color of the ocean itself. She was a member of the race said to be the closest to the Celestials themselves—and a princess to boot. Though that may not be the reason why, Shera's chest, which should normally be much more reserved in size (due to her being an Elf), was instead quite bountiful. She was only wearing a normal hunter's outfit, yet it still managed to emphasize her cleavage, which almost seemed ready to burst free from the fabric.

"Um...so first, I just have to put the crystal in the middle of the circle, right?"

"...Be careful not to step on any of the lines."

"I know, I kn— Ah?!"

"....."

"I-It's okay! We're good!" Shera tried to brush off her mistake with a nervous laugh.

As she bent forward, focusing on her work, her chest jiggled as she moved. Before he knew it, Diablo found himself staring. He hurried to avert his gaze.

—A Demon Lord would never let his gaze wander to a girl's cleavage!

Diablo had the appearance of a man with two ominous horns sprouting from the top of his head. His race was that of a Demon, with his face and body covered in tattoo-like marks. He proclaimed himself to be a "Demon Lord from Another World" when he was first summoned to this one. However, his arrogance and overflowing self-confidence was all just an act. In reality, it was only his Demon Lord role-play that allowed him to speak in any capacity whatsoever.

"Hmph... Even though elemental magic is stronger than any Summon."

"But that's because you're special!" Shera pouted.

"...Even if we were to use Elemental magic, it would not be as powerful as your spells," Rem agreed with Shera. "Most likely, we would not be able to defeat Fallen the way you do. Besides, Summons become shields when it comes time to do battle."

"Well, whatever. Just hurry up and get this ritual over with. No matter what power you may obtain, what matters is how you use it in battle."

“Yeah!” Shera happily nodded.

There was a drawing in the sand by her feet with layers and layers of circles. Symbols and numbers were inscribed within them.

Rem began her lecture anew:

“Listen, and listen well: Each component of this circle has meaning. It regulates the flow of magic, and is the key to causing a clear and distinct phenomenon to manifest in this world.”

“Uh-huh.”

“...The important things to focus on are the time, place, magic circle, incantation, and, most important of all, the magical power and concentration of the caster. A combination of all these elements allows you to perform 《Ritual Magic》, with the ritual magic you are trying to use now being 《Summon Magic》.”

“Seems like a pretty big pain in the butt, huh...”

“...This is the most rudimentary of the basics for this magic. When using Summons, it is possible to call them by throwing crystals, or even by 《Chanting》 a spell, like how an Elemental Sorcerer does with their magic. Ritual magic, however, requires a decent amount of preparation beforehand. While I’m on the subject, using a magic circle to perform spells is formally called 《Rune Magic》. It isn’t suited for combat situations, so you will not find many Adventurers using it. However, for traps found in dungeons—”

“Zzz...”

“...No sleeping.” Rem smacked Shera on the head.

—*So that’s how it works...*

Diablo made a note of this in the “Cross Reverie Other-World Ver. Strategy Guide” in his head.

In the game, players would only see ritual magic and magic circles in cutscenes. They never actually got a chance to use them for themselves. So even though you would see it in those cutscenes, it was the first time for him to see all the specific details that went into preparing the ritual. Since the time and labor that went into ritual magic took longer than any other method, you could expect a much bigger result as well.

Shera stood in front of the magic circle, with Rem giving her instructions.

“...While this might be a bit difficult to wrap your head around—using a ritual to summon a being from another world is called ritual magic. Once the Summon appears, the 《Enslavement Ritual》 is used to force it into the service of the Summoner. Doing this allows the Summon to turn into a crystal.”

“Now that you mention it, Diablo can’t turn into a crystal, can he?”

“That is because he appears to be a Demon Lord from another world... Not only that, but the Enslavement Ritual reflected off of him as well.”

“Then, are we the ones who are gonna turn into crystals?!”

“...Though I have not tried it, I have never heard of any of the races successfully pulling off a crystallization. In terms of magic, I would say crystallization is something similar to the Enslavement Collars in that regard. Perhaps it is best to think of it as one of the Summon’s abilities.”

“Having the Summon out of crystal form causes the Summoner to constantly lose magic power. Tell me: Is our magic power being drained by having Diablo with us?”

“Ah, I guess not, huh.”

“From that, we can discern Diablo is a Demon Lord, and not a Summon—though the fact that I am his master remains unchangeable truth.”

There they went again, arguing over which one of them actually summoned him. He had become used to this by now, and the girls eventually got back on topic.

In his mind, Diablo breathed a sigh of relief. Right after he had been summoned to this world, he had stressed over whether he was going to be turned into a crystal or not. The truth was that Diablo wasn’t an actual Demon Lord from another world—that was all just an act. He was just your ordinary game addict. But it was too embarrassing to admit that now. It was a secret he would have to keep hidden.

“Calling forth a Summon in crystal form is also called ‘Summon Magic,’” Rem continued her explanation. “This means that the enslavement process and the act of using the Summon are both the same type of magic.”

“I getcha, I getcha. It’s like how when we say ‘grabbing a bite to eat,’ it can mean going to a restaurant, or physically putting food in your mouth.”

“...You seem to have a decent grasp on the concept, considering it’s you.”

Shera puffed out her chest with a triumphant chuckle. “Then here I go! I’m going to try using Summon magic!”

“All right... First, start by infusing the circle with magic energy.”

“OK! Hiyaaaah!”

“...We can do without the shouting, thanks.”

“Hm... Now that I think about it, I practiced this on you, didn’t I, Rem?” A mischievous grin on her face, Shera wiggled her fingers as she made grabbing motions with her hands.

“I-If you’re going to bring up dumb things like that, then I won’t

teach you!” Rem’s face flushed bright red.

Diablo blushed as he remembered what the girls had done when they were messing around the other evening. He cleared his throat to try and cover up his embarrassment.

“Just get on with it already! I’m a busy Demon Lord—I don’t have all day!”

In reality, there were no quests for them to do, so most of his time was spent lazing around in their room at the inn, but...

Shera nodded.

“All right, then here I go! Again!”

She placed her hands near the circle—as if she had thrown a lit match onto oil, the drawing in the sand burst into emerald green flames; but it gave off no heat.

—*So this is what they call a “torrent” of magical energy...*

“...As a race, Elves carry the elemental property of Wind... But it seems Shera’s magical energy might be more suited for the Fire element,” Rem said.

This caught Diablo’s interest. He had been so addicted to fantasy MMOs that it had pretty much thrown his life out of whack. These were the kinds of conversations he thrived on.

“Are the beings of this world given a specific elemental property at birth?”

“Yes... However, if one were to experience something that changed the way they thought, then it would be possible for their element to change as well. From what I can gather, I think the state of one’s mind has an effect on one’s magic energy. Those with extreme dispositions, for example, tend to carry the Fire element.”

“*Extreme* dispositions?”

Shera, who always had a happy-go-lucky smile on her face, did not give off even the slightest impression of being “extreme” anything.

“...She gave up her status as princess and left her family and home behind as she embarked on a journey by herself. The only thing I can think to call that is ‘extreme.’”

“Hm, I guess that is true. Then what about yourself?”

“...I would be ‘Earth.’ All Pantherians start off carrying this element, but the reason I carry it now is because of my persevering nature.”

“So I see...”

—*Shera had left Greenwood to be free, so that extreme nature of hers granted her the property of “Fire.” Rem’s perseverance on the other hand, as she endured being a cage for the soul of the Demon Lord Krebskulm, granted her “Earth.”*

“Then from what you can tell, what would I be?”

“...What?”

“Ah, well... Of course, I am a Demon Lord, so I cannot be measured by any of the scales used by the races... But I am interested in hearing how those inferior to myself see me. Go on, give me your analysis. I shall allow it.”

What he really meant was: “I am so dang curious to hear your elemental diagnosis, Dr. Rem”—but a Demon Lord asking others what they thought of him would be pretty lame, which is why he pressed her using his arrogant Demon Lord role-play.

Rem settled deep into thought.

“...Demons have the element of ‘Darkness.’ Ah, I am fully aware that you are a Demon Lord, but your appearance is similar to that of a Demon, so your element might be similar as well. Thinking back to how the mirror turned black when you had your level diagnosed at the Adventurer’s Guild, perhaps it is safe to say you are a Dark-elemental.”

“True.”

—Demon Lords are all about darkness. If she had said I was a different element, that would kinda ruin the image I’m going for.

“...But, as for what ‘Darkness’ reveals about a person... I believe it would be ‘deception.’”

“...What’s this now?”

“It’s possible you could be hiding some big secret, or... Actually, never mind. In the end, this is nothing more than simple fortune-telling. After all, trying to classify something as complex as a person’s heart into one of six categories is just unreasonable.” Rem smiled, seemingly embarrassed.

Calm and composed, Diablo gave a short chuckle in response. On the inside, however, his heart was pounding as he panicked over whether she had seen through his act.

Cutting off their conversation, he looked back toward Shera. She was focused intently on pouring magic energy into the circle.

“...Though I hate to admit it, Shera seems to have a talent for this.” Rem nodded. “It’s her first time, but the gate to the other world is remaining stable.”

“What kind of Summon is she calling?”

“That all depends on her luck.”

“Hm...”

—So it’s all a gacha, just like the game...

Diablo often heard stories of players who had spent hours toiling for materials to perform the summoning ritual, only to end up calling forth a low-rank Summon. On the strategy wiki, you would always see comments like, “It’s not showing up;” “I have a better chance of finding Bigfoot;” or “I don’t think they even put it in the game,” in the

comment sections for the rarer Summons.

Rem leaned forward: “It’s here.”

The gale-force wind coiled around, scattering the magic circle and the now pale blue flames that covered it. White sand danced in the air, blocking their vision. On the other side of the debris—the silhouette of a Summon.

“I did it!!” Shera shouted in victory.

†

It was a Summon about the size of a basketball. It almost looked like a plump, rotund turkey. It had black feathers on its body, and fan-like tail feathers. It flapped its wings, leisurely keeping itself airborne. Its round black eyes sparkled continuously.

“...That would be a 《Turkey Shot》,” Rem sighed.

“It’s so *cute*! This is exactly what I wanted!!” Shera smiled ear-to-ear, completely overjoyed.



“...This could be just right for your first practice.”

“Really? What kind of Summon is this?”

“...To put it bluntly, it is not very powerful. In fact, it may be one of the weakest kinds of Wind-elemental Summons. It’s on the same level as a 《Wind Spirit》—though judging it purely in terms of combat prowess, it is inferior in almost every way.”

“Whaaaat?!”

“It possesses the ‘Synchro Sight’ skill, an ability that allows you to see everything the Summon sees.”

“That’s pretty useful, right?”

“I’m fairly certain it can be used for things like reconnaissance... It takes magic power to activate the skill, so it can’t be used for long periods of time. It might come in handy if you get lost or something.”

“Sounds haaard.” Shera looked a bit dejected.

Rem shrugged. “There are many kinds of Summons, but in the end it’s the sturdiest ones with the highest attack power that are strong.”

“Oh...”

“What are you going to do? There isn’t any reason for you to go through with the Enslavement Ritual...”

“Nah. This Summon came all this way just for me, so I’ll make a contract with it.”

Shera reached into the pouch at her waist and produced a pure white gem. Diablo cocked his head to the side; he had never seen anything like it in the game before.

“And that is?”

“Hm? I don’t really know myself, but apparently you need it for this.”

“...I just explained this to you yesterday.” Rem scowled at Shera’s response. “This is a 《Binding Crystal》. You use this for the Enslavement Ritual.”

“Oh yeah, that! I-I remembered, honest!”

—These kinds of things exist, too? Cross Reverie never even had an “Enslavement Ritual”... Was it redundant to implement from a gameplay standpoint, so they just cut it out?

Or, there could be another reason for it: The “Enslavement Ritual” used to subjugate Summons seems to share similar qualities to the 《Enslavement Magic》 used to enslave other races. It most likely takes Binding Crystals to make slaves as well.

Anything related to slavery in the game had been completely removed.

Rem offered Diablo a white stone.

“...I know you have no interest in Summons, Diablo, but it might be useful when it comes to researching how to remove the collars

around our necks. I think it would be good for a Sorcerer like yourself to at least have one on hand.”

“True, it wouldn’t hurt to have,” Diablo said, taking the binding crystal.

Shera uttered a short incantation:

“...By the name of Shera L. Greenwood, I command you: Heed my call. Give yourself unto me, and obey me.”

Opening her thin, cherry blossom colored lips, she put the white crystal into her mouth. The Summon descended to the ground, still enough to make one think it was sleeping. Shera placed her lips upon the Summon’s head. Faint red sparkles trickled from her lips; the binding crystal had turned into pure light.

Shera stared intensely at the Summon. A black light started to gather around the Turkey Shot’s neck, and a dull, low-pitched hum reverberated in their ears. A loud clank followed, as if something was being locked by a key. It was the same thing that had happened when the enslavement collars were put on Rem and Shera; but the collar on the Turkey Shot was smaller, and made to fit perfectly around its tiny neck. Because of its thick plumage, the collar was mostly hidden from view.

Eyes sparkling, Shera excitedly looked over toward Rem and Diablo.

“It was a success.” Rem nodded.

“Yay! I did it!!”

“Hehe... Thank goodness the spell wasn’t reflected back at you this time.”

“Bleh... I don’t wanna be enslaved by a Turkey Shot!”

The air was filled with the girls’ laughter. Diablo couldn’t stop a smile from spreading across his face as he listened to them.

Diablo suddenly remembered something he had read on the strategy wiki.

“Now, about that Turkey Shot... With him and your bow, you two might just make an interesting combination.”

“Huh...?”

“If this were an FPS, you would be a sniper, while it would be your UAV. I read you could use it like that on the wiki, and—”

“Huh? What??”

Both Shera and Rem looked thoroughly confused—but of course they would; there was no way they would have ever heard of those terms before. He decided to redo his explanation.

—*What can be done in the game can’t necessarily be done in this world, though...*

Putting some distance between himself and the girls, he placed a coin in the grass.

“Can you see the coin from there?”

“Nope?”

“Then try sending out your Summon.”

With a nod, Shera began to concentrate.

“Um... Go and take a look, Turkey Shot!”

Heeding her command, the Summon flapped its wings and took to the air. It did seem a bit dull-minded—but even if it happened to be shot out of the air, the Summoner would not take any damage.

Shera’s eyes opened wide. “Wow, I’m flying! —Ah, I see it!”

“If you know where it is, then that means you can hit it with your arrows, correct?”

“Leave it to me!”

In one fluid motion, she pulled an arrow out from behind her back and nocked it into her bow. It didn’t even seem like she took aim as she released the arrow from the bowstring with a twang. It traced an arc in the air, falling down near Diablo—right where the coin laid in the undergrowth. It pierced straight through the center.

“I got it!”

“Good work!”

Back in the game, you weren’t able to target anything out of your line of sight. By using Turkey Shot to expand your field of vision, you could mark targets to attack from the air. Even back in the real world, as long as you knew where your target was, all that was left was how skilled you were with the bow.

“What’s this...?!” Rem exclaimed in surprise. “I never thought it could be used that way... As to be expected from you, Diablo. Though you say you have come from another world, you are much more knowledgeable about these things than we are.”

“Heh, it’s something you could figure out if you just think it over. I am a Demon Lord, after all.”

In reality, this was just something he had remembered seeing on the wiki. Cross Reverie had hundreds of thousands of players. With that many people, there were bound to be some more eccentric players out there, too—specifically ones who had gone through a series of trial-and-error to see if Turkey Shot, a Summon everyone viewed as a failure, could actually be useful in some way.

But Diablo was in awe of something else—

Shera’s proficiency with a bow was no joke.

—I can’t believe she managed to pierce the coin, especially after how lackadaisical she looked when she shot the arrow. Shera’s level as an Archer must be pretty dang high.

He pulled the arrow out from the ground. The coin had been split

clean in half.

Shera ran over to them. “Thanks, Diablo! At first, I thought that I got the short end of the Summon stick... But I’m really liking this little guy!”

“S-So I see...” Diablo wasn’t used to being thanked like this. He averted his gaze to hide his embarrassment.

“Ehehe, I’m gonna train a bunch more and get my level up!”

“Hm.”

“...Training is all well and good... But with this method, wouldn’t the only thing going up be your level as an *Archer*?”

Shera seemed to be in shock in the face of Rem’s pointed comeback.

Interlude 1

Lyferian Calendar: Day 6 of the Sixth Month, Year 164—

Location: the Royal Capital of Sevenwall, where the Castle Grandiose stood surrounded by seven layers of thick castle walls. This was the waiting room in the deepest part of that castle—

It was here where those who wished to have an audience with the king would stay. Even rulers of foreign countries would be made to wait here, so the furniture and fixings were the epitome of luxurious. It was as if they were there to exemplify the might and authority of the Kingdom of Lyferia.

Vases of pure gold, a crystalline table... The floor and pillars of the room were made of marble, while embroidered silk covered the walls. The ceiling boasted an enormous fresco depicting various, towering gods. There was a great assortment of relics from heroes of old adorning the room, showcasing mementos of those who had repelled the Demon Lords of the past.

And in that room—

The Imperial Knight, Alicia Cristela, stood stock still, waiting in silence. Her reflection was shown in a full-length mirror.

Normally, anyone wishing an audience with the king would be stripped of their weapons; since Alicia was an Imperial Knight, she was allowed to keep her sword at her side. If anything were to happen, she was trusted to jump to the king's side to protect him. There were also cases where people were made to carry in cursed or otherwise dangerous enchanted objects, unbeknownst to the person themselves. For this reason, inspections were performed with the most scrupulous and utmost of care.

On her way back from Faltra, a combination of bad weather and her encounter with the group of knights from Faltra had caused her to arrive later than she had expected. As of now, she was waiting her turn to have an audience with the king of Lyferia.

There were two other visitors in the room with her: Humans, one male and one female, both in their mid-forties. One could tell they were from a position of high social status from a single glance at their elegant personal appearances. They were a married couple, a duke and a duchess—as well as Alicia's parents.

Alicia had left the Royal Capital when she was on her mission,

and went straight to the royal palace when she had returned. This was the first time they had seen each other in about half a month.

Her father, who sported a rather magnificent beard, laid a hand on Alicia's shoulder.

"Good work on fulfilling such a long mission."

"Thank you very much, Father." Alicia slightly raised the corners of her mouth, shaping it into an elegant smile. "I feel no suffering or fatigue when I think of how I am serving for the honor of this kingdom."

"Excellent. I don't believe I need to worry about you, but make sure not to disrespect His Majesty when you see him."

"I am fully aware of that. I would do nothing of the sort to besmirch the name of our family."

"I have raised you well. There are very few women allowed to have an audience with the king. This serves as even more proof showcasing your great talents. You are our pride and joy; be sure to continue putting that talent to use for the good of the kingdom."

"Of course."

"...Wouldn't it be better if you took those off?" Her mother pointed toward Alicia's eyes.

"Oh, these are..."

"A girl shouldn't be wearing metal on her face."

She seemed to not like her daughter wearing glasses. Alicia never had any problems with her eyesight in the past, but it became poor as a result of her fervent studying day and night.

"...I will be sure to take them off."

Without her glasses, she couldn't even see the face of who she was speaking with. She could discern the king because of how prominent his position was in the audience chamber, but the ministers lined up on either side of him were impossible to tell who was whom. But still, Alicia removed her glasses and placed them into the pouch at her waist.

As if she had remembered something, Alicia's mother began to speak: "About those dreadful books I found lying in your room..."

"...What?"

As if her mother was asking for confirmation, she turned to look at Alicia's father who nodded along, smiling gently.

"We found some books that, how should I put it...didn't seem too good for your education, you see. You are free to take an interest in whatever you like... But things like radical ideologies, legends about the Fallen... You should be able to work for the king just fine without knowing such rubbish, yes?"

"That's why we threw them away for you."

".....You threw them away."

“It was for your own good.”

“We’re doing this *for* you, you know.”

A smile spread across Alicia’s face as she bowed her head.

“Thank you for your concern. I apologize for causing you worry.”

Her mother smiled happily and nodded, and her father breathed a sigh of relief.

“You truly are the perfect Imperial Knight. If only you were a boy, then I would have no complaints... But, no matter. I will find you a suitable partner soon enough. Our dukedom will be secure.”

A knock on the door; it looked like it was finally Alicia’s turn. She bowed her head once more.

“Mother, Father, if you will excuse me...”

Beaming with pride, the parents saw their daughter off.

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—I wonder how good it would feel if I could just cleave the heads from their shoulders.

Walking along the red carpet, Alicia gripped the handle of her sword, that she had purchased back in Faltra, with her left hand. As you would expect from a place called the front-lines of the races, its appearance was second-rate, but its sharpness was top-notch. Even after cutting down the ten knights who had attacked her, the blade itself hadn’t suffered a single chip or scratch. With a sword like this, it should slice through a Human’s neck like it was nothing... In her mind, she daydreamed about bringing the blade down.

—No. It’s still too soon.

Alicia still needed to get some use out of her position in society. If she was going to exterminate these unsightly, rotten races, she couldn’t do it alone.

She needed the Demon Lord.

Her position of being an Imperial Knight as well as a daughter of a duke was invaluable to the Demon Lord’s resurrection. She couldn’t afford to lose that, to make the world a more beautiful place... Alicia had to be an obedient daughter, and an earnest Imperial Knight.

Taking her glasses out of her pouch, she placed them back on her face. Masking her face with a smile, she entered the audience chamber.

Countless pillars loomed in the cavernous room, with a lofty ceiling above. It was large enough that it could hold the kingdom’s many generals as they lined up before heading off to the battlefield. The country’s flag hung on the wall, boasting a color scheme centered around the color red; even the carpet was just as red. A luxurious

chandelier hung from the ceiling, with the numerous gems embedded in the fixture sparkling as they were lit up by the glow from the candles.

Delouche Xandros, the sixth king of Lyferia—he would be 37 years old this year.

Alicia approached the raised platform where the king sat. When she was about eight paces away from the throne, she knelt to the ground and lowered her head.

“...Alicia Cristela, Imperial Knight, has made her return.”

“Raise your head,” Delouche called out to her.

Receiving approval from the king, Alicia looked up toward the platform. The king sat on a grand throne, one that had been chiseled from marble and inlaid with jewels and gold. If a person as equally grand sat upon it, it would surely make known their own solemn majesty.

The king of Lyferia was still quite young. Delouche had dealt with no major problems in terms of domestic affairs... But by nature, this country was quiet and peaceful, and was blessed with bountiful harvests from both the land and the sea.

The problem lay in his military aptitude. It was a factor still unknown to Alicia. The king had taken the throne twenty years ago, and there had been no large-scale engagements since that time.

Delouche had a sharp expression in his eyes, but that merely could have been due to his hardened nature developing over the years.

The stories of how Adventurers in Faltra managed to repel an army of Fallen had made their way to the Royal Capital. It was for that reason that Alicia had been dispatched to Faltra.

—The Demon Lord.

Nothing was more important, and nothing posed a greater threat to the Kingdom of Lyferia than any developments related to that being.

There were six Humans gathered near the king; from generals to ministers, they were the big wigs of the country. Of course, Alicia was well-versed as to who they were.

The stares from above the platform focused on her. If she had been any ordinary person, it might have been enough to make her faint.

Delouche spread his arms wide.

“I see you have returned safely, Alicia Cristela. Splendid work on your mission.”

“I am unworthy of such praise, Your Majesty.”

“According to your previous report, you said there had been a skirmish with the Kingdom of Greenwood... I would like for you to provide more details regarding that encounter.”

Delouche didn't want Alicia's personal opinion on the matter, rather, he requested information as the eyes and ears of the king. For her, however, it wasn't about what she had to say, but how she framed the information.

"My report is as follows: The Kingdom of Greenwood sent a demand specifying the return of the runaway Princess Shera, and sent troops to the Eastern Lakefront Forest. It seemed they had no intent to invade at that time; however, Sir Galford took the Elves entering his territory as a declaration of war, and executed the acting commander of the troops, Prince Keera. The Elven soldiers never entered Faltra. Though it may have been the land he governed, it may not have been necessary for Galford to eliminate Prince Keera. As a result, the relationship between us and our neighboring country has now become uncertain."

"Hm..." Delouche crossed his arms.

The king had, most likely, already received a report from the governor as well; she couldn't make any bold-faced lies here. However, she had managed to slip in some words suggesting the governor should show some self-restraint in her report. This would be sure to limit what Galford could do from here on. The less obstacles in the way of the Demon Lord's resurrection, the better. He was one of the heroes of the great war, someone who, single-handedly, was unimaginably more powerful than any of the races. In fact, if possible, she wanted to make him disappear from Faltra—

But she wouldn't do anything rash. There was something else she had to keep hidden, more than anything else.

"...Now, just who is this 'Diablo'?" Delouche inquired.

"I believe him to be an Adventurer. Was that not in Sir Galford's report?"

"No. It came from one of our informants in the city."

—I get it now.

Though Galford had tried to eliminate him, it seemed he held Diablo's combat prowess in high regard. If the governor had made a report saying Diablo was dangerous and was ordered by the king to capture him, he would be at a loss over how to cope with the situation. There wasn't any chance someone like Galford would report back saying he couldn't win against a lone Adventurer. That meant his motive here was to hide information regarding Diablo, and was planning on using him as a tool to fight against other countries, or even the Fallen.

Wanting to keep Diablo, and his power, a secret was in line with Alicia's plans as well.

—I seem to be wearing a lot of masks lately.

In front of her parents, she acted the part of the diligent and

obedient daughter. For Diablo and the others, she acted as a humanitarian, pretending that her role in life was to help others. Alicia's actual goal, however, was the obliteration of all the races by resurrecting the Demon Lord. That is why she covered for Diablo. As of now, he seemed to ally himself more with the other races—but one day he could awaken as a true Demon Lord. Not only that, Alicia had felt traces of the Demon Lord inside of Rem. Could she be the key to the resurrection...?

Right now, she needed to take the king's attention away from this matter.

"Your Majesty, there does exist an Adventurer by the name of Diablo, but I do not believe we need to be concerned of him."

"Then what about these murmurs I hear of him defeating an army of one hundred Fallen?"

"I believe that to be a result of the exaggerations of a great number of Faltra's Adventurers. After all, Diablo is said to merely be an 《Elemental Sorcerer》."

Whenever someone mentioned a "Sorcerer" in the Kingdom of Lyferia, one would think about "Summoners." Elemental Sorcerers were so weak, they were not even worth talking about. Delouche understood that well.

"Hm... So it was only a rumor."

"That town is filled with Demis. Rumors spread there cannot be taken as truth."

"So I see."

There was a deep-seated resentment for Demis in the Royal Capital. Delouche was a person of nobility, and though he strove to be as fair as possible, he could not completely separate himself from the opinions of those around him. If Alicia said the rumors of an impossibly powerful Elemental Sorcerer were the result of Demis, there was no way the king would believe it.

This should end our audience with him thinking everything is fine in Faltra... —Or so Alicia thought.

Delouche was more persistent than she had expected, however.

"Now, Vinashin, you see..."

When he suddenly brought up the name of the Royal Seer, Alicia made a noise of silent disapproval in her mind. She made sure not to let it show on her face.

"Was it one of Lord Vinashin's prophecies?"

"Indeed. Three days ago, he foresaw that there were 'Omens of the Demon Lord's resurrection in the town to the West.' I can only imagine that to mean the city of Faltra."

"I see. That is the most specific it has ever been..."

It took a tremendous effort on Alicia's part to hide her

overwhelming joy. She had to be careful not to show how she truly felt.

A Seer was someone who was able to scry into the future, and was an invaluable asset to the country—with the prophecies of this particular Seer in service to the king being remarkably accurate.

And he had predicted the second-coming of the Demon Lord! Alicia couldn't have been happier with the news. But due to this prophecy, the chance of someone interfering with the resurrection had now skyrocketed. This had always been the case—the military or other Adventurers would disrupt the Fallen's ritual, resealing the Demon Lord right before it could be resurrected...

"Of course, I believe Faltra is well prepared for such an event. The hero Galford is there, as well as the ten thousand elite soldiers I have dispatched to the city. Most importantly, they have a large-scale barrier protecting them. Even if the Demon Lord were to resurrect, they should be able to bide time until the main forces of the Royal Capital could arrive..." Delouche spoke as if something seemed to be troubling him.

"Yes, I believe their preparations to be flawless. So much so that if we were to divide our military strength with the West, defending the Royal Capital and our other territories would become a precarious situation... The Holy Land of Vylaar lies to the East, after all."

The king's nearby officials voiced their opinions as well:

A general asserted that if there were signs of the resurrected Demon Lord, the Royal Capital's forces should be sent in now.

The minister in charge of the national treasury countered with a rebuttal, claiming that mobilizing a large army would require an equally large budget. Funds were limited, so if they squandered the kingdom's cash reserves for no reason, and a time came where they were in dire need of money, they would face a deficit. If they declared a state of emergency and forced heavy taxation on the citizens, it would further ruin them financially. Furthermore, the people were the foundation of a country. There were no nations that had ever lost while their citizens were wealthy. When the people became destitute, it was a signal that declared the country's demise was at hand.

Delouche was no fool. He wouldn't rally his armies based on suspicion alone; but it seemed like he still wanted to take some sort of preemptive action.

"Your Majesty!" Alicia stepped forward. "In that case, please allow me to return to Faltra once more. Due to the confrontation with the Kingdom of Greenwood, I made my way back to the Royal Capital with haste to deliver my report as quickly as possible—but if there are signs of the Demon Lord's resurrection, I will find them and put a stop to it!"

Her voice was brimming with a sense of justice and duty to her country.

“Hrm...” Delouche solemnly nodded. “Although, I was thinking of allowing you to rest after sending you on such a far away mission...”

“I humbly thank you for your concern. However, as long as it is for the sake of the kingdom, this body of mine shall feel no fatigue. Please, give me the order, Your Majesty.”

“Wonderful, truly wonderful! I must be one of the most fortunate kings in the history of our country to be blessed with a knight such as yourself. Very well—then I leave this matter to you. Return to Faltra and root out any indications of the Demon Lord’s resurrection.”

“With certainty!” She deeply bowed her head.

There were some things she hadn’t expected, but in the end, everything had gone according to plan. It was difficult trying to hide the exaltation she had felt on the inside.

Alicia lifted her head and opened her mouth, prepared to announce her intent to depart—

From behind her came the sound of solid, clanking footsteps.

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The noise of something metallic scraping against itself mixed with the sound of footsteps—

It was the rattle of armor.

—We aren’t at war right now, so why show up to the audience chamber in full armor...?

Alicia reflexively turned around to look. There stood a man who left an impression sharp as any sword. He wore scarlet-colored plate mail, and carried multiple blades on his person: two swords on either side of him, and two swords on his back for a grand total of six longswords. Chains extended from the pommels of his swords, which made a grating metallic noise as they scraped together. He also sported a dagger that was affixed to his body with a belt.

As he got closer—

She could smell blood on him. It seemed like he tried washing it away, but the stench had seeped into his very being. The man wore a pleasant smile on his face, at odds with his appearance, which looked like he was ready for war. He knelt down next to Alicia.

-

An attendant scurried over to receive the letter he offered, handing it over to the king. Delouche nodded as he unfurled the parchment.

“Hm... I see. Good work.”

Alicia found it extremely rude for him to not follow the proper procedure of the audience chamber, but did not voice her complaints

out loud.

The High Priest held the most powerful position in the Church. The Kingdom of Lyferia put their faith in the “Ancient Gods and the Celestials,” and it was evident that faith played a large role in supporting the livelihood of the races. Miraculous healings were not unheard of, and blessings of bountiful harvests were all but guaranteed.

Long ago in this world, it was said there existed both Celestials and Fallen. The ancient Gods of the Celestials and the King of all Fallen, the Demon Lord, were locked in eternal strife, but in the end, the Gods emerged victorious over the Demon Lord. As punishment, they broke his being into fragments, which were then sealed away.

The Gods bestowed their graces upon the war-ravaged land, and created five races from the blood of the Celestials: Humans, Elves, Dwarves, Grasswalkers, and Pantherians. These were all descendants of the Celestials. However, the race known as Demons were an outlier, and were said to be Humans whose blood had mixed with the Fallen.

After granting the bountiful land to the races, the Celestials returned to the heavens. The people praised and revered the Gods said to be watching over them from above, praying for salvation in this world and the afterlife.

It was the most popular religion in the Kingdom of Lyferia. The authority of the Church was strong, and the power the High Priest held was enough to rival that of the king.

The king’s chief vassals laid words of praise upon the Paladin, though strains of fear tinged their voices.

The term “Paladin” referred to any of the holy warriors who “enact God’s will through force.” Paladins would hunt down the Fallen and any who followed them. These devotees wished for the Demon Lord’s resurrection, and were known as 《Demon Lord Worshipers》. On that point, they were no different than the army or the Imperial Knights.

Where they differed, however, was who they worked for.

Paladins served the Gods, and acted in accordance with the intentions of the Church. They abided not by the law, but by their own doctrines. Though they claimed it was the “will of the Gods” as to who was designated a Demon Lord worshiper, Paladins took it upon themselves to pass judgment. They would make their decisions based on their own personal biases; so even if the person in question was an aristocrat or extremely wealthy, if they were branded as a worshiper of the Demon Lord, they would be subjected to the most gruesome torture imaginable.

In other words, a Paladin was a sword that protected the authority of the Church. Even the high-ranking officials of the king's court did not want to be involved with them as they did not want to become targets of the Paladins.

Fortunately, the number of Paladins was quite small. In comparison to the Imperial Knights, who were over one thousand members strong, there were only thirteen Paladins.

"I heard you had been sent somewhere in the South to handle a matter the other day..." Alicia muttered. "You sure have made quite the hasty return, Sir Saddler."

"Indeed, the job of us Paladins is to swiftly and surely root out any Demon Lord worshipers and deliver to them salvation. I was having such a hard time finding Demon Lord worshipers in that Southern village—but I, being a mere servant of the Gods, could only follow their will. In the end, the entire village was kind enough to lend me their assistance."

"...What happened to the villagers?"

"I offered them *all* salvation."

Alicia felt the muscles in her back freeze. He hadn't answered her question outright, but a Paladin's methods only consisted of two things: torture and murder. Because that Southern village had been branded as harboring Demon Lord worshipers, it was most likely all its inhabitants had been brutally massacred.

—I couldn't care less about the races dying.

Alicia wasn't bothered in the slightest about that. Paladins, however, were a serious threat.

Say, for example, the king or his ministers started to suspect that Alicia truly wished for the resurrection of the Demon Lord—it would not be a problem, as she had already prepared a plethora of excuses to talk her way out of it. She had even gone so far as to build up her own achievements to make sure no doubt would be cast upon her.

This would not work on a Paladin. If they had come to suspect you, what awaited was merciless torture. Though she was confident she wouldn't talk, she couldn't wipe away the fear of having her body and mind broken. She didn't want to get involved with them if she could help it. Alicia wanted to excuse herself from the throne room as fast as humanly possible—

—when Saddler said something she was not expecting.

"Though it may seem rude of me, I happened to overhear the details of your mission just now, Miss Alicia Cristela."

"...And what of it?"

"Your dedication to take the mission upon yourself after hearing the Demon Lord might be resurrected... It's truly marvelous!"

"...Thank you."

“However, I was thinking this mission might be more suited for us Paladins. I would humbly request you leave Faltra in the hands of this humble servant of God!”

“That would be...”

—*A problem.*

She couldn’t think of a way to turn his offer down so suddenly. If she were to suddenly reject him, she was in danger of being suspected as a Demon Lord worshiper. Even if it was a false charge, it was difficult to provide evidence to the contrary. Not to mention that Alicia was a worshiper of the Demon Lord who wished for their resurrection. She didn’t know how well she would be able to hide that fact.

Delouche would not let this pass without first raising his own objections on the matter. The look on his face alone had said it all. He wouldn’t be able to turn a blind eye if a Paladin were to do to Faltra what Saddler had done to the village in the South. If nothing else, Galford would not stay silent if that happened. The king wanted to do everything he could to avoid a confrontation between the military and the Church.

“Your Majesty, if I may...” The lowest ranking of the chief vassals, a young minister, respectfully bowed his head.

“O-Oh! Yes, Noah, do you have any brilliant ideas for us?”

Alicia did not know much about the man named Noah, aside from him being a rising star in the royal court. Not only was he well-versed on politics and military matters, he had deep knowledge regarding subjects like agriculture and medicine as well. It was rumored that his proposals had revolutionized industry in the kingdom on a national scale.

His appearance could only be described as beautiful, and his blond hair and blue eyes almost made him seem like he had been manufactured to be flawless. Yet he did not give off a cold aura; in fact, he had a gentle smile playing on his lips. He could almost pass as a girl with short hair.

It was said he was the adopted child of the Marquess, Gibun, but Alicia hadn’t looked any further into his background. But at this point, the only things she wanted to hear from him were something that would either shut up the Paladin, or some kind of plan to protect Faltra.



“I am sure both Miss Alicia and Sir Saddler are more than worthy of our trust. How about we leave this matter to the both of them?”

“Hm... So you’re suggesting we should have them work together.”

“Their objectives are the same: to find traces of the Demon Lord. To that effect, I thought it would be sufficient to have them join forces to achieve that goal.”

“...That is not a bad idea.”

It seemed Delouche had taken a liking to Noah’s suggestion. Even if the king couldn’t outright reject Saddler, this way he could still keep an eye on his mayhem.

—Is this man trying to kill me? Or does he actually think I would be able to restrain a Paladin?

Alicia cursed Noah under her breath, while Delouche made his new decree:

“Imperial Knight, Alicia Cristela... You are one of my most trusted individuals. I would think there be no qualms in conferring you the imperative role of searching for signs of the Demon Lord alongside this Paladin—but what say you?”

At the very least, it didn’t seem like the king had wanted to make Alicia a sacrifice in this venture. If Delouche valued her this much, Saddler wouldn’t be able to label her a Demon Lord worshiper so easily, even if he and Alicia had a conflict of opinions on their journey.

It would be a different story if the Church was planning on opposing the king, however...

“Having one of the capable and gallant Imperial Knights with me is truly reassuring! In the name of the Gods, I vow we will find the signs of the Demon Lord’s resurrection and put a stop to it.” Saddler was reverent in his praise.

“I will endeavor to meet your expectations at any cost, Your Majesty.” Alicia bowed her head deeply.

Walking alongside Saddler, they left the room, the large doors closing shut behind them.

The Paladin kept that same affable smile on his face.

“Let’s begin our preparations for the journey right away, Miss Cristela. Are you all right with leaving tomorrow morning?”

“Yes, that sounds appropriate.”

“This will mark my first appearance in Faltra. The former Demon Lord’s Domain is close by, so who knows how many Demon Lord worshipers are there... It certainly seems to be a town filled with people in dire need of salvation.”

“Salvation... That may be. Sir Saddler...”

“What is it?”

“Do you hate the races?”

“Of course not! I’m *terribly* fond of people. In fact, you can say that I love them! They are both the descendants and inheritors of the Gods’ blessings, after all. That is why I can never forgive anyone who worships the Demon Lord.”

“...I see. I understand.”

—*He loves people, so he kills them... I don’t get it at all.*

The only thing she could be certain of was that her troubles had increased. A rather large hole had been torn in her once perfect plan. She stifled a particularly deep sigh.

“By the way, Miss Cristela...” the smile vanished from Saddler’s face. “Your facial expression hasn’t changed at all, has it?”

“What?”

“See? Even now, you are consciously trying to hide what you’re feeling. Just what could be the reason for that, I wonder? Perhaps, it’s because you *must* hide something?”

It felt like her chest had been pierced with a knife. Waves of nausea washed over her. But she had worn this mask of hers for a long time, and she forced it into a wry smile.

“...If I were to smile or act surprised all the time, I’m afraid it would make me seem immature... Thus, when I am in places such as the audience chamber, I consciously make an effort to keep my facial expression serious. Though, that might be hard for someone like you to understand. No matter your facial expression, you always seem so dignified.”

“Ah, how terribly rude of me! Please, don’t feel like you must worry over such things in front of me. I wouldn’t do something so foolish as judging someone based on the expression on their face.”

“Thank you. I appreciate that.”

“After all, the value of a person is decided by the color of their organs, wouldn’t you agree?”

“.....Wha—?”

She no longer knew what face to make after hearing that. All she knew was that she had a sickening sensation in the pit of her stomach.

Chapter 1: Speaking with the Fallen

The day after Shera had obtained her Summon—

Diablo and the others had come to the river's edge in the 《Western Lakefront》. There were rocks scattered about, but for the most part the area was plain and level, with underbrush that came up to their knees. It was about an hour's walk if you headed downstream from the Bridge of Ulug.

Today, they were taking care of a gathering quest. Not only was it easy, but because of some recent public unrest, there was a handsome reward waiting for them after it was finished. In other words, it was easy money.

Having finished gathering all the herbs they needed, they ate the hard-baked bread they brought for lunch.

It was said that there wasn't much difference between seasons in the area around Faltra, and that even in summer the temperature didn't rise that much. That being said, it was probably somewhere around mid-June in this world, and the hot days just kept on coming.

If they had left now, they would probably make it back to town right before evening.

Shera crinkled her nose.

"Hey, Rem, doesn't it kinda...smell?"

"...Smell? We *are* right next to the river, so it does smell like grass and dampened earth, I suppose."

"No, it's not that... It's *you* that kinda smells."

".....What?"

"Mm, yeah, you stink. I mean, we *were* moving around all day today. That's why you stink of sweat. And dirt. And, hm... How do I put this smell? Kinda like...a wild animal?"

She sniffed loudly. Rem jumped backward, wrapping her arms around herself.

"D-Don't sniff me like that! I *don't* smell!"

"You should at least take a bath here first! Actually, I wanna do that, too! C'mon, let's do it!"

"For goodness' sake... All this just because you wanted to bathe in the river... And doing it by saying that other people smell is rude, you know!"

"You're wrong! You really *do* stink!"

That forceful declaration left Rem stunned speechless.

“You think she smells, too, right, Diablo?!” Shera switched targets.

“Hm? Uh... I wonder...” Diablo scratched his cheek, avoiding eye contact with the girls.

—I don’t want to have a conversation about who stinks or not...

He had finally gotten used to being around Rem and Shera, but the truth was Diablo had zero experience talking to girls outside of his role-play. Nonetheless, he tried focusing on his sense of smell, just to be sure.

—To be honest, I don’t really smell anything.

Just as Rem had said, they were by the riverbank, so it smelled of damp earth and grass.

—It’s better than my room back home, at least. All that dust...and the mold... Ugh, I don’t even want to think back to it...

“Hey, what about me, Diablo? I *did* sweat a bunch.” Shera brought herself closer to him.

Perhaps it was because she had gotten warm from picking herbs for their gathering quest, but the “sweet smell of a girl” wafting off her was much stronger than usual. It was a pleasing fragrance, to say the least. But saying that out loud would make him seem like a weirdo, so he was a bit troubled about how he should answer her.

“H-Hm...”

Rem looked like she was about to cry. She backed away, putting some distance between herself and Diablo.

“...Diablo, do you, um... Do you think I smell, too?”

At a time like this, the best course of action would be to use some smooth-talking to make sure he didn’t hurt her feelings, and then try and change the subject:

“Well... Um...”

—If he could say something as suave as that, he wouldn’t have this much trouble speaking in the first place. Like hell he knew how a Demon Lord would react to a girl asking if she smelled. He couldn’t even begin to imagine it.

“It’ll be fine! You’ll be clean in no time once you take a bath!” Shera said cheerfully.

“...If I did that, it would be the same as acknowledging that I really do smell.”

“Then do you wanna come over here and have Diablo sniff you?”

Rem glowered at her.

“...Pantherians do *not* like being drenched in water. When our fur gets damp, it makes it harder to move and dulls our ability to sense what is happening around us...”

“Then this is a good chance for you to start liking baths!”

“What kind of logic are you using?!”

Shera took Rem's hand, who was protesting all the while. Though Rem seemed reluctant on the outside, she didn't resist.

Speaking of bathing, Diablo would only wipe himself down with a wet towel from time to time. It seemed they weren't in the habit of using baths or showers in Lyferia.

The climate was dry and breezy, which made it easy to live here. It was always pleasant enough that you could wear a brand-new work shirt on a hot day and still feel fine.

—It just might be a good idea to take a dip every once in a while...

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Even if there were less Adventurers taking on quests, taking a bath in a place where people came to gather herbs was a bad idea—so instead, they had moved further downstream. They found a spot at a bend in the river; a place where the wind had blown gravel and sand to form an arch-shaped piece of land.

The flow of the river was gentler here, so it was a perfect spot to jump in and bathe. It was also at a lower elevation than the rest of their surroundings, so the girls wouldn't have to worry about anyone seeing them in their swimsuits.

"...Hm? Swimsuits?"

"What's up, Diablo?" Shera asked, head tilted.

"Did you both bring swimsuits with you?"

"What's that...?"

"...A 'Swim Suit'? Is that some kind of special tool?"

"Are you planning on going in the water with your clothes still on? ...I guess it's a good chance to take a bath and take care of the laundry all at once."

"Ahaha, we'd catch a cold if we did that," Shera laughed.

"...True. It would damage our clothes as well."

Shera had placed her belongings on the riverbank, which included the herbs she had gathered, her bow and arrows, and a small pouch filled with coins and her Summon crystal.

"It's only natural to get naked when taking a bath, Diablo! Duh!" She started to loosen the strings that held her clothes together.

"...Stripping down in front of strangers is one of the reasons I will never like about bathing."

"We're not strangers, we're friends! Riiiiight?"

"...Geez."

Although her shoulders slumped, Rem didn't deny what Shera had said. Placing her belongings on the ground as well, she undid the hook on the back of her clothes.

Diablo started sweating bullets—and not because of how hot the weather was.

—**NAKED?!**

There's no such things as swimsuits in this world?! How can that be?! They had already implemented them in the game, though!!

He started to panic, slightly.

Seemingly not embarrassed in the slightest, Shera took off her hunting outfit. Her voluminous chest gave a generous bounce as it was freed from her clothes. Though she was blushing, Rem removed the light armor covering her modest chest, as well. The tips of each of her budding breasts ended in a small, pink dot.

Diablo's head flew backward as if he had been punched in the nose.

“BWAHAH?!”

“...What's the matter, Diablo?”

“You OK? Did something happen?”

The two girls looked at him, concerned. At this point, he wanted to ask if *they* were all right.

“A-Are you guysh not embarrassed?!” His true self slipped out a bit.

Rem covered her chest with her hands.

“...Y-You shouldn't say that. It is only natural to remove your clothes before bathing. Even though you can look at others, it's only polite not to.”

“That's right! Saying things like how flat someone's chest is, even if they *are* a Pantherian, is rude, too, you know!”

“Whaaat?! Then why are you saying it, you stupid boobs-for-brains Elf?!”

“That's mean!”

While still arguing, the two girls began to take off the rest of their clothes. Shera hooked her fingers in her shorts, while Rem did the same with her spats—or were they spats? There's no way this world would have elastic textiles like spandex here, so they have to be cotton or some kind of outfit made from magical materials—either way, Rem grabbed her spats, and Shera her shorts.

—And pulled them down.

Right before he could see their perfectly round buttocks and most private of places—Diablo turned his back to them. This was the first time his heart had beaten this fast since coming to this world.

—I think I might have a heart attack... If I was the kind of guy where seeing girls naked wouldn't bother me like this, and I could stare at them all I wanted, I think my life here would have been a little different.

Damn, I'm such a loser...

Heaving a heavy sigh on the inside, Diablo tried to play it off: “I am not fond of bathing. You two should just focus on getting that stench off yourselves.”

“I don’t stink!”

“I do not smell!”

—the girls reacted at the same time.

For the time being, Diablo kept his back turned to them. The only things he could hear were the gentle flow of the river and the sound of the girls talking.

“...Because of you, Diablo’s image of me has been practically dragged through the mud,” Rem said with a sigh. “I wash myself with a cloth every single day, so even if I do sweat a little, I will not smell one bit. A Pantherian’s sweat doesn’t smell, after all.”

“Is that true?!”

“...I-It doesn’t smell. It’s not even salty.”

“That so? Let’s see here...”

“Ee—k?! Where do you think you’re licking?!”

“Mm-hm, mm-hm. I guess it’s not salty... I think? Wow, how does that work?”

“...I-I will never tell you the reason for as long as I live.”

“Elves are kinda the same. Actually, we don’t really sweat at all. The smell would give us away when we’re hiding in the forest and all that.”

“...Pantherians are the same in that regard. Our ancestors used to hunt in the plains.”

“Huh, is that so. You wanna try licking my sweat, too?”

“Wha—?! I have no interest in doing that whatsoever!”

“Then I guess I’ll just have another lick of you~”

“N-No, stop it! Never again!”

—The sound of water splashing.

“Aw, she went underwater.”

“Hm-hmm. Now there’s no more sweat.”

“I’m gonna dive in, too!”

Another splash. Diablo could hear the sound of them struggling in the water.

“Why are you grabbing onto me?!”

“Ehehe! Back home, everyone would chase each other around and hold each other like this! But since I was a princess, I always had to wash myself far away from everyone else...”

“...I-I see... Eeek?! Why are you squeezing my butt?!”

“I’ve been thinking it for a while now, but you’re pretty fit, aren’t you, Rem.”

“You just have too much extra fat, even though you’re an Elf!”

“It’s not fat! It all just goes to my chest, OK?! See! Look at this! My tummy is all nice and flat!”

“Ngh... This... This is what you call useless fat!”

“Ahn! I-If you’re that rough... Mm! You... You have to be more

gentle~!”

“Curse you! Curse you and your useless sacks of fat!”

“Ahhhn! Mn—mmm!”

Hearing the sound of their splashing mixed with Shera’s moans, Diablo just couldn’t take it anymore.

—*It might be all right to take a peek...right?*

It wasn’t like they had told him *not* to look. If it was just for an instant...

While pretending to survey the surroundings, Diablo tried stealing a glance behind him—

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!”

The sound of Shera screaming resounded across the river.

“Ah! I-I’m sor—”

Diablo was on the verge of apologizing when he realized something was wrong.

—*Wait... That scream sounded urgent!*

“A-Are you a Fallen?!” Rem cried out.

†

—*A Fallen?!*

This was no time to be embarrassed. Preparing himself as he turned toward the river, he reached into his pouch for 《Tenma’s Staff》. He could see Rem and Shera in the river—

And one other—a Fallen he had seen before.

Her silver hair coiled down below her waist, and upon closer inspection, scales could be seen making up the surface of her dark skin. With her small body, flat chest, and large eyes, she looked almost like a child. But there was no mistaking it—she was a Fallen. Her gold-colored eyes contained reptilian, vertically slanted pupils. It was the commander who had led the army of one hundred Fallen on the assault of the Bridge of Ulug—

Edelgard.

She had a vice grip on Rem’s arm, lifting Rem in the air. She grasped a spear with her other hand.

A cold sweat broke out along Diablo’s back. The soul of the Demon Lord Krebskulm was sealed within Rem’s body; if she died, then that soul would be freed. If Edelgard found out about that secret, she would kill Rem instantly.

Diablo felt his insides grow hot.



“Why have you come here?” The tone of his voice was harsh, enough that it surprised even himself.

No matter what spell he used, it would be difficult to only hit Edelgard from such a point-blank range. The only magic he possessed with that kind of pinpoint accuracy didn’t have enough power to drive off a Fallen.

Shera was shaking in fear. She must have remembered this Fallen as the one Diablo fought against on the Bridge of Ulug. Tears dripped from her face as she came to realize Rem’s desperate predicament.

“R-Rem! No...!”

“Grh... Let me go! To think a Fallen would show up here... Ngh... Diablo, use your magic! Don’t worry about what happens to me!”

—Don’t be stupid. There isn’t a chance in hell I would abandon you. I just have to do it—I have to use a spell powerful enough to blow away a Fallen in one shot..

I’m going to make sure my magic only hits the Fallen!

He adjusted his aim to a spot where he would *just* manage to catch Edelgard in the blast. Diablo began to cast his spell—

Right before he could finish, Edelgard slammed her spear into the water, lodging it into the riverbed. She removed her hand from the weapon.

“Not here, to fight. Wouldn’t come alone, to fight you.”

“What...was that?”

“Talk? No talk?”

“Release Rem—*now*. If you don’t, nothing will remain once I annihilate you.”

“OK.”

Surprising everyone, Edelgard readily released her grip on Rem, who made a hurried escape away from the Fallen. Shera ran up to meet Rem and threw her arms around the Pantherian, tears in her eyes.

“Waaaah! Reeem!”

“S-Stupid Shera!”

“I thought it was too late! I thought you were gonna diiiieee!”

“...I had already—ngh...prepared for the worst...” Remembering the fear of death she had faced moments ago, Rem’s slender shoulders were trembling.

Edelgard showed her bare hands.

“No fighting today. Edelgard came, to talk.”

Rem and Shera looked toward Diablo, uneasy looks in their eyes.

—Should I trust her? ...Would a Fallen even try to talk with other people?

Though she did release Rem...

“Hmph...” Diablo lowered his staff. “It seems you’re no fool after all. You know very well what will happen should you incur my wrath.”

“Edelgard, is smart?”

“You said you had something to talk about? Then why did you lay your hands on Rem?”

“...Have own reasons, too.”

“Oh?”

“Can sense, Demon Lord’s soul? Confirmed, after I touched her. It’s there.” Edelgard turned her golden eyes toward Rem.

“Eek?!” Rem shrank back. Shera pulled her closer, as if to protect her.

“Tch...” Diablo clicked his tongue. “You can understand just by touching her...?”

Just a short while ago, Diablo had gone through training in order to sense the flow of magic energy. Because of that, he was now able to extract a wealth of information from whomever he touched. What Edelgard had just done might have possibly used those same basic principles.

It didn’t seem like Edelgard was lying, and it wouldn’t be out of place for the Fallen to be more perceptive in sensing the Demon Lord’s presence compared to the rest of the races.

—But then why did she set her sights on Rem earlier? That Fallen Gregore, who appeared in town the other day, didn’t seem to have a clue...

But now’s not the time to look into that. I have to think of a way to deal with the situation at hand.

“And suppose the Demon Lord’s soul truly is inside Rem. What will you do? Will you kill her? That would mean you will have to face me.”

“Like, I, said, not here for that, today.”

Her spear remained lodged deep in the riverbed. She made no obvious attempts to remove it.

Edelgard was a Fallen. Though she had a strange way of talking, she wasn’t an idiot; but maybe that should be obvious for the commander who led an army of one hundred of her Fallen brethren.

If the only requirement to revive the Demon Lord was to kill anyone who held its soul, then the Fallen would have killed everyone who had the potential to meet such criteria. There would be no point in going so far as to confirm if the soul was actually present or not.

“Hm... It seems your information differs from what I’ve heard.”

Shera was left blinking in surprise.

“What? What’s going on?! Someone explain it so I can understand, too!”

“...There is no more getting around it...” Rem let out a small sigh.

“All right, then. I will tell you everything about the secret I hold.”

†

Edelgard stood in the middle of the gently flowing river, her spear protruding from the water that came up to her waist.

Diablo was closer to the riverbank, so the water only came up to his knees. Beside him were Rem and Shera, both completely naked. Beads of water dripped from their hair, creating rivulets as it ran down their skin.

Rem spoke in a quiet voice: “...The soul of the Demon Lord Krebskulm is sealed inside of me.”

“Wha— Huh— Whaaaaat?! The Demon Lord?! *That* Demon Lord?!” Shera shouted.

“...I heard from my mother that if I were to die, the soul of the Demon Lord would then be revived.”

“What?! No! Then why are you working as an Adventurer?! That’s super dangerous!!”

“I was entrusted with this seal by my mother. When it comes time for me to bear a child, the seal will be passed on to them as well. This cycle will continue indefinitely, until the day Krebskulm is revived... That is why I made up my mind—I will defeat them with my own two hands. I became an Adventurer in order to become strong enough to do just that.”

“Ah! Is that the ‘problem’ you were talking about back at the inn?”

“You sure remember well, considering it’s you. As long as Krebskulm remains undefeated, I don’t have the luxury of being able to run a café with you.”

On a night not too long ago, Shera had spoken with Rem about her dream to run a café with the three of them. At the time, Rem had claimed she was dealing with “a certain problem,” which is why she couldn’t answer Shera then.

Shera puffed out her cheek.

“I care about you, so of course I would remember it! But I never imagined that it would be about having the soul of a Demon Lord stuck inside you...”

“...I would be in trouble if it were that easy to find out. Celes and Diablo were the only ones to know of this.”

Celestine Baudelaire, the Head of the Mage’s Association of Faltra, had known about Rem’s secret for a long time. On the other hand, the same night he met her, Diablo had made Rem come clean after “torturing” her. At that time, he had made a promise to her—

—A promise to accept her problem as his own.

“I know it’s a huge secret... But I still kinda wish you told me.”

Shera looked crestfallen.

“...I’m sorry. I thought it for the best not to make you bear the burden of knowing as well.”

“Yeah, I know I’m not the best at keeping secrets... But if anything happens to you, I want to be there to help you... Because we’re friends!”

Shera took Rem into her arms again, tears dripping down her face. Rem looked surprised.

“...Was it that much of a shock that I was keeping a secret from you?”

“No, it’s not that... I’m crying...because you’ve been trying so hard to keep that secret! You must have been so lonely and sad... It must have been so hard for you... I’m sorry... I’m sorry, I never noticed...”

“...Ngh...” Rem clenched her teeth, her eyes misting over as tears spilled down her cheeks as well.

An absent-minded look on her face, Edelgard tilted her head to the side.

“...Still all right, to ask questions? If this takes long, I’ll go. Don’t want to be found, by other races.”

Diablo nodded. “Ask. I will allow it.”

He wasn’t going to let this end with Rem’s confession.

“You want, to defeat the Demon Lord? Serious?”

“...I am.” Rem nodded. “There is something I wish to ask you as well: I thought the Fallen would come to kill me if they knew the location of the Demon Lord’s soul... Will the Demon Lord not resurrect with my death?”

“Will happen. No doubt. If you die, Demon Lord resurrects. But, kind of wrong... Demon Lord is, delicate? Not enough, to just break vessel.”

“...I see. I’ve heard rumors that some kind of ritual is needed for the resurrection.”

“Yes. Edelgard wants, complete resurrection, for Demon Lord. That’s why, won’t take your life. Won’t let you die!” Edelgard clearly declared.

“You know a way to completely resurrect the Demon Lord?” Diablo asked her.

“I do. Heard about, from Fallen priests.”

“Hm...”

Shera squinted her eyes at the Fallen.

“Is it safe for Rem?! You’re not gonna stab her with some kind of ritual knife, are you?!”

In Diablo’s mind, that did seem more like a finale worthy of a Fallen ritual. But Edelgard shook her head.

“...Should be, no danger. None. Actually, she be treated important. Like, mother of Demon Lord?”

She nodded reassuringly.

—*Can I really believe her?*

Even if it was a ritual that would cause Rem to die, Edelgard wasn't stupid enough to come right out and tell them about it.

“You, don't trust, Edelgard?” she spoke up. “You don't! That's why, I will tell you ritual. You will be ones doing it. Other Fallen, will not interfere. Believe me?”

“You do offer reassuring points.”

It was hard to say Diablo actually trusted her; but if Diablo could go through with the ritual without any Fallen getting in the way, then that made it all the less dangerous for them. Rem's safety was his number one priority, after all.

His other concern...

—*Can I win against Krebskulm?*

Diablo glanced at his left hand. The 《Demon Lord's Ring》 was on his finger, an extremely rare item that would reflect all magic. The black armor he wore was known as the 《Ebony Abyss》, while his cape bore the name 《Curtain of Dark Clouds》. On his head, he had equipped an item called the 《Distorted Crown》, which was the reason it seemed like he had horns growing from his skull. Tenma's Staff was also his weapon of choice.

All the equipment he owned were some of the most powerful items in Cross Reverie, and had led Diablo to victory in his battles, both in-game and in this new world.

—*There's no reason to hesitate now.*

He felt the white noise in his head die down. This would sometimes happen when he faced a seemingly indomitable enemy; his thinking became more simple. Now, he thought nothing of the worries that plagued him before.

“We will resurrect the Demon Lord Krebskulm...and I will defeat them!”

Diablo made his declaration, and Rem nodded. Diablo had promised her as much the night she revealed her secret to him.

“...I believe in you, Diablo.” It almost sounded like she was uttering a prayer.

“What?! You're going to beat the Demon Lord?! Can you even do that?!” Shera was shocked.

Edelgard's lips twisted into a smile. “Heh... Even if, one hundred Fallen join together...still, not strong enough, to defeat Demon Lord.”

Of course the Demon Lord would be strong. Otherwise, there wouldn't be any point in going through all this trouble to resurrect them. There wasn't even any instance in the game where the last boss was over a hundred times more powerful than the mid-boss that came before it...

But what about this world? There was no way to make sure he would make it out unscathed. But not doing anything because he was worried about being safe was nothing more than despicable procrastination on his part. After all, was there even any guarantee he would be safe if he chose to do nothing?

“Edelgard, I will grant you my assistance until Krebskulm is revived. After we succeed, I will crush this false Demon Lord—I will show you that I, Diablo, am the *true* Demon Lord!”

“Hmm~? Demon Lord, is strong... They are strong, so they are Demon Lord... That's why, won't lose.”

“I know you're strong too, Diablo...” Shera was uneasy. “But Krebskulm is supposed to be *super* strong, right? I don't want you to die!”

There was no guarantee he would win. The Demon Lord Krebskulm hadn't even been implemented in the game yet. He knew absolutely nothing about their powers.

But what if Krebskulm was supposed to be an enemy fought years from now? By that time, the level cap for players would have changed... Powerful equipment, much more powerful than his own, might have been implemented, too... His worries sprung forth endlessly the more he thought about it.

The fear made him want to curl up into a ball, cradling his head in his hands—but a Demon Lord would always face these things with a smile. They wouldn't be scared stiff by uncertainty, or panic if the odds weren't in their favor; and they certainly didn't wait to make a move until they had guaranteed their own safety.

—*A Demon Lord always faces down his enemies with a smile!*

And just like that, a smirk spread across Diablo's face.

“You doubt my power, Shera?”

“I-It's not that... It's dangerous, you know? You don't even know how powerful Krebskulm is supposed to be...”

Diablo snorted.

“I have said it before, and I will say it again: I am the true Demon Lord, the most powerful being in existence. No matter who or what is resurrected, if they face me, then all that awaits is their destruction by my hands!”

Rem dropped her gaze toward her stomach. “...I believe in you. Please...save me from this curse.”

“Of course. Only a fool would worry now, so leave everything to

me.”

“OK.” Shera nodded. “I’m a little scared...but I’ll believe you! So please—help Rem!”

There was an earnest expression on her face as she spoke those words. He couldn’t afford to betray the girls’ trust and expectations they had placed in him.

Diablo turned to look at Edelgard.

“You shall have my assistance with your ritual. I assume you have no complaints?”

“OK. Edelgard, will tell you, about ritual.”

—That’s the talking part out of the way...

Edelgard’s eyes narrowed. Sensing a murderous intent from her, Diablo steeled himself for a fight—

But those harsh feelings were not directed at him or the girls, but somewhere behind them.

He heard the sound of feet stepping on grass—

†

There were outlines of people peering over the riverbank: a group of five men. They were a ragtag group of multiple races, wearing dirtied clothes and carrying axes and swords. Diablo couldn’t think them to be Adventurers here to gather herbs, as the looks in their eyes were anything but wholesome.

Rem’s face stiffened. “...Bandits... and now, of all times...”

“Eek?!” Shera covered her body with her hands. The girls were still stark naked.

Diablo clicked his tongue.

—Now that I think about it, the rewards for quests have been pretty high because of all the public unrest lately...

These guys are probably the reason why.

In the game, bandits were treated the same as monsters when they showed up, not as NPCs. In this world, they were no different from the other races you would find back in town.

The Pantherian at the front of the pack let out a vulgar cackle.

“Hyahah! Well damn, aren’t we lucky! Check out those beauties, boys! Whew, just look at the tits on her! Amazin’!”

He was staring straight at Shera and Rem. The girls covered themselves with their arms, expressions of disgust on their faces.

“...Ngh... To be seen by these people...”

“Blegh, gross.”

The group of bandits made their way across the gravel on the riverbank.

“What do you wanna do? Wait for the boss?”

“Nah, we gotta make sure to tie ’em down first. If they get away,

the boss'll whoop our asses. We're killin' the guy and grabbin' the girls!"

One of the bandits pointed at Shera.

"Whoa! Hey, I've seen that one before! That's the Elf princess that's famous around town!"

"Hyahah! You serious?! That's amazin'! I've always wanted to try bein' one of them fancy pants aristocrats!"

"That's a black-fur Pantherian there, too! We should be able to sell them for a fortune!"

"And as for the other one—" One of the Dwarf bandits set his sights on at Edelgard. A curious expression crossed his face.

"Ain't she a beauty... But is she a Demon? Maybe somethin' else... She's got eyes like a lizard, and scales on her skin... Huh? What is she?"

The other bandits noticed it, too, and backed away.

"Ack?! O-Oh, hell! Oh hell, oh hell, oh hell!! Is... Is she a Fallen?!"

"It's a Fallen! There's a Fallen heeeeeere!!"

The bandits began to flee. They knew who Shera was, and realized Edelgard was a Fallen. If they made it back to Faltra, they would let the whole town know Diablo and the others had met with a Fallen.

Diablo readied Tenma's Staff. They were the same as monsters; he understood that, and yet he still hesitated.

The bandits had left the riverbank, and were running through the underbrush—

At this rate, they would get away. Diablo tightly gripped his staff.

"Ngh..."

He heard a splash. Edelgard had pulled her spear from out of the riverbed, a dark energy wrapping itself around the weapon.

"... 《Darkness Slash》!"

She made a giant sweeping motion with her spear as she shouted. A jet-black flash of light burst from the tip of her weapon, that light becoming a gigantic blade, soaring through the air. Diablo's eyes almost popped out of their sockets.

—*Isn't that too OP?!*

It was a long-range Martial Art that could be used by sword or spear-users. It would transfer the user's SP to their weapon, transforming it into a blade they could launch at their enemies. It wasn't supposed to be that powerful of a technique, but considering Edelgard's stats as a Fallen, who knew how much damage it would inflict on the races.

The enormous blade created by Darkness Slash sliced thorough the fleeing bandits.

"Gah...?!" Five screams layered on top of each other.

The bandits' bodies were split clean in half. It was like something

out of a bad horror movie.

Rem furrowed her eyebrows, while Shera let out a small scream. Diablo grit his teeth.

—*She killed them...like it was nothing...*

“Y-You didn’t have to kill them all, did you?!” Shera yelled at Edelgard.

“Being seen, by others. Problem. That’s why, I killed them. Being seen with Fallen, bad for you, too?”

“Th-That may be true... But still!”

Rem stopped Shera.

“According to law, killing bandits after they have attacked you is not a punishable offense. They are the same as monsters, and we just treated them as such. If we left them alive, they would still kill those weaker than themselves. They would still steal from and torment other people.”

Her voice trembled slightly as she spoke, but what she said was proof she didn’t call herself an experienced Adventurer for nothing.

“I know they were bad people, but...” Shera’s shoulders slumped.

Diablo feigned indifference, but he was shaken up on the inside.

—*The same as monsters, huh...*

That must be what it’s like here... No, I guess that’s what it was like back in my world, too. Anyone who would kill and steal had a high chance of being put to death. If you were attacked and killed your assailant, the law would recognize it as justifiable homicide. No matter if it was a monster or a bandit, any living thing would kill another to protect its own life. That’s just a law of nature.

On the other hand, I hesitated. My peaceful life in Japan may have made me forget all about this rule of life.

Diablo sighed. “...What you did was unnecessary.”

Edelgard shrugged.

“Can’t, calm down here? That’s why, three days from now... On night of full moon, will wait at 《Starfall Tower》. Will do ritual, there.”

Diablo nodded. It would be a problem for them if anything were to interrupt this ritual. Not only that, but when facing a powerful enemy, it was desirable to fight in a more enclosed area. He wanted to avoid fighting in an open space like this if he could help it.

Edelgard walked back toward the center of the river. It seemed like she had no qualms with being in the water.

When she was finally out of sight, Rem and Shera let out the sighs they had been holding back, and hurried to start redressing themselves.

Diablo looked back toward the corpses of the bandits lying in the grass. He thought to himself, *That’s just how this world works. It’s kill, or*

be killed.

†

Three days later—

Diablo and the others were grabbing a bite to eat at 《Pointy Ears》. It was a shop on the western side of town, run by a Pantherian. Funnily enough, the restaurant was filled with cats as well.

The food at the 《Peace of Mind Inn》 was by no means bad, but sometimes Diablo wanted to try eating somewhere else for a change of pace. This store prided itself on its thick slices of meat and deliciously fragrant cheese. It was quite the extravagant meal for the common person in Faltra.

It was lunchtime, and the place was packed. Perhaps it was because the staff and the owner were Pantherians, but the restaurant was filled with Demis. The high-class shops that Humans would frequent were located more in the North District of the city.

At first, Diablo's fiendish appearance and the enslavement collars around Rem and Shera's necks had attracted inquisitive stares from the other patrons. After they had kept showing up at the restaurant, however, people had gotten used to them, and no one made a fuss of it now.

Rem had taken an interest in a conversation happening next to them. Diablo turned his attention to it as well.

A Dwarven man and woman were talking at a table near them.

"Hey, so it seems like there's a Paladin coming to Faltra."

"What for?"

"Maybe there are rumors of the Demon Lord resurrecting or something. The Fallen did show up in town a while ago, he might've got some information that there were Demon Lord worshipers here."

"That sounds pretty scary."

"We have to make sure and be careful, too."

"Why? We're no Demon Lord worshipers."

"Well, it looks like it's the Paladin Saddler who's coming. He's supposed to be a real piece of work. I've heard he captures and tortures people for no reason... Then, once he forces them to admit they're Demon Lord worshipers, he executes them."

"What! Why would he do that?!"

"Who knows? Demis like us are easy targets, so it might be best to leave town for a while."

"But we've got work, right?"

"...Just southeast of here is a Dwarf settlement. That's my hometown, where my folks live. So if you're all right with it... Um...

Would you come with me to meet my parents?"

"I-Is that... Do you really mean it...?"

Tch. Go die in a fire, normies.

Diablo clicked his tongue as he thought things over.

—Seems like there's another guy coming to town who I won't ever get along with...

Rem looked at him, worry on her face. "...It might be good for us to avoid walking around town for a while."

Diablo had been thinking the same thing; Shera nodded as well.

"You're right. Diablo is a Demon Lord, after all, so it would be dangerous if this guy saw him!"

It was just as the girls said—but a Demon Lord would never say they should cut down on going out because they were afraid.

He puffed out his chest with a snort.

"What trite. I don't care if he is a Paladin... If he dares to oppose me, I will crush him."

—Not that I have a reason to go outside anyways!

It was probably for the best that they avoided going outside for a bit. Staying home was Diablo's specialty, anyway. If he could order things online here, he was confident he could stay in his room forever.

"Diablo, tonight we have that 'business' to take care of, so let's refrain from causing any trouble." Rem speared a piece of meat with her fork as she spoke.

"I know."

It should go without saying that he didn't want to be picking fights with anyone.

—Tonight's the night we promised to meet with Edelgard.

"Night" most likely meant sometime after the sun had set, which would probably mean they would be meeting sometime after 7 PM. They had more than six hours to wait until then.

—It would probably be best to just hang out in the room until it's time...

A commotion was stirring inside the restaurant. A Human woman entered through the small doorway of Pointy Ears—someone he recognized.

She was a tall, slim woman who boasted long and slender arms and legs. Her red hair came down to her waist, and she wore glasses, giving the impression she was more of an intellectual sort. The light armor she wore left her shoulders exposed, and looked easy to move around in. She wore an embroidered cloak of sorts on the back of her armor.

It was the Imperial Knight, Alicia Cristela.

She scanned the restaurant. Spotting Diablo and the others, she

walked toward them. Shera raised a hand and waved.

“Alicia!”

“It has been quite a while, everyone. I have just made my return.” She offered a short, polite greeting.

“Alicia...” a smile broke out on Rem’s face. “I’m glad you’re safe. Did you have any problems on your journey?”

“None whatsoever. And yourselves?”

“.....No, nothing.”

Rem had faltered a little when she answered; but she was the type to think before she spoke, which is why no one would think twice of this slight gap in her speech.

The thought of her promise to resurrect Krebskulm had probably just crossed her mind. This wasn’t something they could talk about in a place with this many people around, of course.

Shera patted the table with her hand. There just so happened to be one empty chair there.

“Come on, have a seat! Are you hungry? The cheese here is to die for!”

“...What are you talking about, Shera? It’s all about meat at Pointy Ears.”

Watching Rem and Shera with a wry smile on her face, Alicia turned to ask Diablo: “May I join you, Sir Diablo?”

“Do as you like. I have no reason to refuse you.”

When Alicia had come along with them to save Shera, she did it without consideration for her position as an Imperial Knight, or even her own life. He had felt indebted to her for that.

With a gentle smile on her face, Alicia sat down opposite of Diablo in the chair offered to her.

“I have news to report.”

“Hm.”

The patrons around them who were watching exchanged whispered conversations of their own.

“Hey, she’s an Imperial Knight.” “I thought she was here to come arrest that suspicious-looking Demon guy...” “You hear that? She called him ‘Sir’ Diablo. That guy’s no ordinary person after all.” “What’s their story? It’s kinda freaking me out.”

It felt like people’s biases against him had grown a bit stronger.

—But a Demon Lord doesn’t get self-conscious just because people are gossiping about him behind his back!

Keeping his arms crossed, he pretended like he didn’t hear all the people whispering about him. Alicia gave them the rundown.

“His Majesty has already resolved matters with the Kingdom of Greenwood. I have convinced him you are nothing more than an ordinary Adventurer, and he will not mobilize his forces. With this, I

am sure you will not attract any unwanted attention from the Royal Capital.”

—*Thank you! Just, thank you!!*

But a Demon Lord saying “Thanks for keeping the army away from me!” was pretty lame. On the other hand, telling Alicia what she did was a “waste of time” after she went through all that trouble wasn’t quite right either...

As he remained silent, Rem leaned forward: “Thank you, Alicia. It would be a disaster to have the army come for us now.”

“I know, right?” Shera nodded. “After all, tonight we’re gonna be — Ow?!”

Right before she could say anything more, Rem kicked Shera’s leg from under the table.

“In addition, Sir Galford has not made any kind of report to the king regarding you, Sir Diablo,” Alicia continued. “Most likely, I would think he is concealing your existence, and plans to use you for battles against rival countries or the Fallen.”

“So I see.”

—*That would explain why he’s done nothing to bother us since I fought with him.*

“Once again, you continue to impress, Sir Diablo. For someone like you to repel danger with your very existence... As someone charged with the protection of this country like myself, I admire you.”

“Hmph... I’ve never once thought about protecting this country.”

Alicia lowered her voice: “There is also one more thing I wish to warn you about.”

“What?”

“...A Paladin by the name of ‘Saddler’ is coming to this town.”

“So I’ve heard.”

Rumors of Saddler had already spread even to this very restaurant.

“You already know of him? Impressive, just as I would expect from you, Sir Diablo.” Alicia nodded. “Saddler is extremely dangerous, so please take great care to be cautious of him.”

“Rem and Shera just finished telling me the same thing...”

“I am fully aware of your power, Sir Diablo. However, Paladins not only have all the prowess of a knight, but have the power of ‘miracles’ at their disposal as well.”

“Hmph. No matter what power he may possess, I will not lose to him.”

He thought back to what Paladins were like in Cross Reverie. They didn’t really have any part in the story, but from what he could remember, those who bore the title of Paladin were in service to the Church. There were no encounters in the game where you had to fight

one, so he had no idea what their stats were like.

—*They were just harmless NPCs back in the game, though.*

He didn't remember seeing the name "Saddler" in the game, either.

"Even if there is no need for you to worry, we have to consider Miss Rem and Miss Shera as well. There is no such thing as being too cautious around Saddler," Alicia added worriedly.

It was true: If Diablo ended up butting heads with this Paladin, the more likely it was that Rem and Shera could end up being targets as well.

"Is he that dangerous?"

"Unfortunately, yes... If Saddler suspects someone of being a worshiper of the Demon Lord, they are subjected to the cruelest of torture, which will continue until they admit to the accusation."

"What did you just say?" Diablo glowered.

"The excuse they use to justify it is that, 'This is how the Church protects the world.' It also makes it nigh impossible for anyone to oppose the Church."

"That can't be... Are you telling me they murder innocent people?"

"If they label those who criticize the Church as Demon Lord worshipers, it means they can reduce the number of people opposed to them. This way, the voices of their critics become that much smaller as well."

"I can't understand it. What makes them any different from bandits or monsters? How can they get away with such atrocities?"

"It is a fact that this country would never have been established were it not for the Church."

Diablo suddenly remembered something else that had nothing to do with the game:

"Now that you mention it, the Church did play a major role providing social services in the Middle Ages... After all, it acted as a replacement for hospitals, banks, schools, and even social welfare..."

As he muttered these words, all three of the girls turned to look at him, confused looks on their faces. Things like "banks" and "social welfare" didn't exist in this world, so of course there wouldn't be any words for them, either. It looked like the people here couldn't understand concepts they had never heard of before. Diablo himself still hadn't looked into the "how" of him communicating with others in this world.

"A-hem!" He tried to play it off by pretending to clear his throat. "Regardless, the Church is an irreplaceable existence in the lives of the people here. On top of that, they are widely supported, and hold a vast amount of authority as a result. So does that explain why people

turn a blind eye to their violence?"

"Yes. Though the populace may fear Paladins like Saddler, they also praise them because they believe the number of Demon Lord worshipers is being reduced."

"And in reality?"

"There can be no mistake in regards to his abilities. As much as I can gather, I think there are no Demon Lord worshipers to be found in any of the towns or villages he visits."

"As I thought."

—*While I don't think the Church is entirely full of selfish people, it seems like Paladins are killing people for the benefit of the Church.*

"That's awful! How can a Human country be so messed up!" Shera was indignant.

"...I'm sure they have their own excuses for doing so, but I most certainly do not wish to get involved with them."

To Paladins, critics of the Church were their enemies. They probably saw them as no different than monsters. That's why they killed others in a twisted form of self-defense, as if they were protecting the reputation of the Church. Diablo could understand why they did it if he thought about it as such.

Even though he could understand why they did it, he had no reason to go along with their selfish actions, however. Because Diablo had been in the middle of his Demon Lord role play, he said he would "crush" Saddler if he opposed him...

—*But please, please, pleeeeee don't let me get mixed up with him!*

Alicia bowed her head. "I would request you all stay in the inn as much as possible. I will be working to get things done on my end by attempting to have Saddler return to the Royal Capital as soon as possible."

"Hmph... I understand what you are trying to say. However—I will do as I please!"

—*And that is to stay holed up in my room at the inn!!*

Though she had a slight look of concern on her face, Alicia nodded.

"Thank you for listening to what I had to say."

"You're gonna eat something, right, Alicia?" Shera changed the conversation back to food. "Cheese? Cheeeese?"

"We will order more meat." Rem flagged down one of the waiters.

"I am supposed to be overseeing Saddler... I wonder if it would be all right for just a little while?" Alicia gave them a troubled smile.

"...It seems you have your hands full."

"It would be a problem if he started causing trouble, after all."

That atmosphere in the restaurant changed in an instant. Alicia and Diablo turned to look toward the entrance of Pointy Ears.

A gentle-looking smile on his face, a man in full armor had entered the store.

Numerous swords adorned his being. The chains that extended from the pommels of his blades made a grating metal sound that assaulted the ears. They were close to the former Demon Lord's Domain, so it wasn't that strange to see someone in full platemail. However—

The man looked toward them, the same smile on his face.

Alicia hurriedly got up from her chair, a tense expression on her face. It was then Diablo realized: This was Saddler.

—I should have never gone outside today!

The feeling of wanting to shut himself away in his room intensifying, Diablo and the other girls stood up as well.

Following behind Saddler were four Human knights dressed almost exactly the same as the Paladin. They all bore a single sword, and kept a vigilant watch on their surroundings.

—Those must be his subordinates... So this is a Paladin's envoy.

†

Saddler and his knights approached the table.

“As always, thank you for your hard work, Miss Cristela. You said you had some business to attend to, but that was to meet with these fine adventurers?”

A smile played on Alicia's lips. The tension in her face from before had disappeared.

“These are the Adventurers who took care of me last I was here. I thought it only proper to say hello.”

“I see, I see. We Paladins always bring along our own subordinates, but it seems Imperial Knights must often rely on local Adventurers to assist them.”

“Though, it's best to solve these matters yourself if you are able.”

They were talking with such pleasant smiles on their faces, so anyone looking from an outsider's perspective would think they were perfectly friendly with each other. The truth of the matter, however, was that the tension in the air was so thick, you could cut it with a knife.

Saddler turned his gaze toward Diablo. “A pleasure to meet you. I am Saddler, a Paladin in service to the Main Church of the Royal Capital.”

“.....”

—I can't just say nothing here... I have to at least give him my name.
To be frank, Diablo was nervous.

—I can't threaten him, but it'd be a problem for my Demon Lord act if I show even a little humility. I'm not going to say anything I don't have to... I just have to tell him my name. That's all. It should be fine if I do things like I always do—it has to be!

"I am Diablo, a Demon Lord who has come from another world!"

—Ah... I just said I was a Demon Lord, didn't I.

He broke into a cold sweat as Alicia's eyes flew open in pure shock. It may have been the first time Diablo had seen her normally composed expression break down like that.

Rem placed a hand on her forehead in exasperation, while Shera wore an incredulous look on her face. Saddler burst into laughter.

"Hahahaha! Adventurers out here in the sticks are hilarious! So you're a Demon Lord, are you? Looks like you got me good!"

Regaining her composure, Alicia gave her usual smile. "Yes, our Diablo is quite the jokester."

The smile instantly vanished from Saddler's face. His eyes were the same as a predator about to devour its prey.

"—Even as a joke, for you to be this intimate with someone who calls themselves a 'Demon Lord'... It seems we have a big problem here, Miss Cristela."

"Huh?!" Alicia was taken aback.

—I wasn't expecting him to go after Alicia like that.

Diablo couldn't take back what he had said now, but he didn't know what he should say... Alicia was also at a loss for an explanation that would vindicate herself.

Saddler continued, as if tormenting his prey while it was on the verge of death.

"Even though His Majesty places so much faith in you, you end up talking in secret with people like this... I believe you could call this a clear betrayal of that trust, wouldn't you?"

"These Adventurers have been kind enough to lend me their assistance. I have nothing to be ashamed of."

"I wonder about that... Are you, perhaps, hiding something?"

"Are you planning to torture me to find out? What would His Majesty think if you were to try and falsely accuse me here?"

"Oh? So you think the king would oppose the Church just to protect a lone Imperial Knight, is that it?"

"And you believe that the High Priest would go so far as to slight His Majesty in order to allow a Paladin to rampage as he pleases?"

Alicia's expression had become more intense by this point. Though she was a woman, she was an Imperial Knight; she wasn't going to take any false accusations lying down.

There was a ferocious exchange of glares between the two of

them. The only way to describe this situation was like handling a lit firework; Diablo would only get burned if he tried to get involved.

—Until a third person stepped in.

“...What a strange conversation,” Rem said as she came forward. “Exactly what is it you are trying to say about Miss Alicia Cristela coming to meet with us? I am an experienced Adventurer, while Diablo has protected this town from the Fallen, despite the fact he can say some strange things at times. I find it strange for you to condemn her just meeting with us.”

“Don’t talk to me, you damn slave!” Saddler had a frenzied look in his eyes. It looked like he would cut her down at any moment.

Rem flinched, placing a hand on her neck. Because of the enslavement collar fastened there, those who didn’t know the circumstances surrounding it would probably think her to be a slave.

“...I am no slave, and Miss Alicia has done nothing wrong. In fact, she is a wonderful person who puts her own life on the line to protect others. As an ally who has fought alongside her in battle, I cannot overlook what you have just said.”

“I told you to be silent, slave!”

“And I told *you*, I am no slave!”

“So a slave thinks she can lecture *me*, a servant of the Gods...”

The animosity on Saddler’s face showed he had already passed judgment on Rem, and that he had not listened to what she had to say.

“...I don’t care who you are,” Rem said, facing him head on, “but if you are going to make these illogical accusations, then I will equally refute them!”

Thinking about their promise to perform the ritual tonight, as well as the fact she carried the Demon Lord’s soul inside of her—Rem shouldn’t be trying to draw attention to herself. In fact, of all the people in this town, she was the one who should be attempting to hide from Saddler the most. Even so, she hadn’t been able to sit idly by when Saddler had cast doubt upon Alicia. She was the type who would always stand up to these kinds of tough situations.

If she were to get married and have a child, then the Krebskum seal would be passed on to them instead. She could lead a much safer life. But Rem became an Adventurer in order to stop this herself, and sought the power to achieve her goal. It was the same even now. Saddler had set his sights on Alicia, but Rem had come forward of her own accord.

—*She’s pretty brave.*

Rem, who never looked back on her decisions to face danger; Alicia, whom Rem had come to see quite dearly; and Shera, who worried about them both...

—They were all precious to Diablo.

Arguments were not his forte, so things were most likely to calm down if he didn't get involved now—but Diablo stood vigilant. If Saddler tried to draw his sword against any of them, Diablo would be there to protect them.

Saddler fixed Rem with a blistering glare.

“You think...you can lecture this apostle of the Gods...? How can one *be* so foolish!”

“I'm telling you this because you are wrong. If you think you are in the right, do not simply decide it by yourself. Explain it in a way that we all can understand!”

“Damnable Demi slave! You would mock the Gods?! You deserve divine punishment!”

As Saddler's face twisted maliciously, Diablo felt the presence of magic energy.

—*What's going on?!*

Rem pressed a hand against her neck. Her enslavement collar made a loud clanging noise when suddenly, she was overtaken by a violent fit of coughing. Alarmed, Shera ran over to her, supporting her by the shoulders.

“Rem?! Rem!!”

“Ngh... *cough*! Urgh...?!”

“Th-This is... She's 《Paralyzed》?!”

Diablo was stupefied; all Saddler did was glare at her. Well, he shouted abuse at her, too, but there was no way that could have been the incantation for a spell. It didn't look like he had used any magic items or special weapons, either. As far as Diablo could tell, it didn't seem like he had done anything particularly out of the ordinary.

—*Was that 《Subtle Chant》?!*

“Subtle Chant” was a special skill learned at level 60 after investing points in a Sorcerer build. Just like elemental magic, the spell needed to inflict the “paralysis” status effect fell under the Chant category of magic; but, as the classification itself states, in order to activate such magic, the caster needed to physically utter the name of the spell.

But by learning Subtle Chant, it seemed you were free from the restrictions of verbal commands and could even cast spells without having to say them aloud. Back in the game, it was merely a special skill that would shorten casting time for spells to have them discharge faster.

—*I probably could have guessed it if I had thought back to what its description was... So this is what it looks like in this world.*

It made it seem as if Rem's suffering was a punishment handed down from the Gods themselves.

—*That means he's over level 60, then.*

It looked like he knew more than a few sword techniques as well, which meant his total level must be much higher than that. Saddler was in a league of his own compared to the average Warrior.

The Adventurers of this world only sought to be strong enough to keep living, and prioritized their own safety above all else. A good majority of the soldiers were probably the same way. Not valuing their own lives meant they would be rushing to an early grave, and death here meant the end. There was no respawning back at town, and there existed no magic that could bring the deceased back to life.

But Saddler was different. Similar to Galford, he had attained power for the sake of winning. There was no mistaking he was a fearsome opponent. If at all possible, Diablo wanted to avoid fighting him.

Fully aware of the danger—

Diablo sneered at him.

“Your foolishness knows no bounds, you absolute *weakling*! Divine punishment? Hah! It's only magic!”

“What?!” Saddler's bloodshot eyes widened.

“Flaunting that power as if it came from the Gods... Fitting for someone who only *claims* to be their servant. It only makes me doubt your supposed ‘faith’ as well. Before you judge others, you should begin by proving your own innocence.”

“Y-You doubt my innocence?! *Me*, a Paladin?!”

“A position granted to you by an imbecilic Church will not serve as any kind of proof!”

“Grk... Does a Demon like you think he can insult a Paladin the likes of me?!”

“The only thing I've done is speak the truth after a certain fool of a Paladin used magic on *my* property. You are not even worth taking the effort to insult.”

Diablo sneered at him again. As soon as he did, he finally realized his own feelings:

—*I was mad this whole time.*

From the rumors of the Paladin's violence and his withering contempt for those around him; his false accusations against Alicia; his disparaging remarks to Rem after she bravely stood up to him; and his deceptive way of using magic...

Faced with all this, Diablo was enraged.

Considering his opponent's position and strength, it was probably smart not to confront him. But Diablo's own pent-up feelings had caused him to kick aside his own self-interests, which is why he had

spoken out before he knew it.

The tension in the restaurant shot through the roof, with the customers around them fleeing toward the walls. The staff and the cats had fled to the other side of the counter.

Saddler's shoulders were shaking with rage.

"You dare...to cast doubt...on my faith... You have roused the anger of the Gods...!"

"Hmph. If the Gods require someone like you to tell me they are angry, they must be nothing I need concern myself about."

"I shall bring down divine punishment upon you. Know the true salvation of the Gods and *suffer* for what you have done. You all—round up the others and bring them to the Church. I will teach them what it means to be saved by the graces of the Gods—*thoroughly*."

Rem was still afflicted with "paralysis," and looked to be in pain even now. Shera was at her side, continuing to look after her. Alicia stood in front of the girls in a protective stance, her right hand gripping her sword. Diablo couldn't let Saddler lay his hands on any of them.

Having calmed down somewhat, Diablo went to influence Saddler's next move.

"Hmph... Divine punishment? Why don't you just call it magic? That's what it is, after all. Something that worthless will never work on me."

"You godless heathen! Repent as you turn to stone!"

Saddler fixed his glare on Diablo. Despite his quick temper, he still hadn't attacked Diablo yet.

It was true that after using a skill, there was a cooldown period where it couldn't be used again. In this world, it was more like a sensation where you couldn't work up the concentration needed to do that particular action for a certain amount of time. It was similar to when you would focus to pass a thread through the eye of a needle, but being unable to do it again immediately after doing it the first time. This brief respite was presumably in order for Saddler to use his Subtle Chant skill again.

Whatever the case, it didn't matter, because there could be no doubt about it: Saddler was indeed using magic.

The strange light that came from Saddler rushed toward Diablo. The ability of the Demon Lord's Ring activated—the ability to reflect all magic.

Saddler froze where he stood, the same expression of animosity on his face. With a loud crackling sound, his body became an ashen gray

And turned to solid rock.

Saddler's subordinates became restless as they looked at each

other, unsure of what to do. With someone as strong as Saddler, his level had to have been particularly high. They imaginably hadn't doubted for a second that he would have lost.

"Hmph... So you used 《Petrification》 magic, did you? And after I went through the trouble of telling you it wouldn't work on me," Diablo scoffed.

On the inside, Diablo thanked the Gods for his magic reflection ability. If his ring's effect hadn't activated because Saddler's magic truly turned out to be "divine punishment," and had it ignored the status effect negation of his Curtain of Dark Clouds, he would be a statue right now.

—I guess I didn't really have to take his attack head on like that... But he might have died if I used my own magic on him. I didn't want to bust up the restaurant, either.

He didn't even have the time to pull out his 《Prototype Great Scythe》, either, which was what he used when he wanted to hold back.

Not knowing exactly what had just happened, the restaurant staff and customers were still on edge. Even the cats poked their heads out from their hiding spot to look.

Alicia went to check on Saddler and let out a gasp.

"What on earth...?! He's completely turned to stone!"

"This was most likely caused by the spell 《Cement Lock》. It's an Earth-elemental spell that causes such a status effect."

"So this is the power of magic reflection... Astounding. Seeing it with my own eyes is quite the shock. I never expected it to be so overwhelmingly powerful."

"It appears you haven't informed this Paladin of my power, either."

"...If Saddler had not been the kind of vulgar person who condemns innocent people, I might have ended up telling him."

"So you predicted we may have ended up facing him."

Not only that, but she hadn't given him any information that would have put Diablo at a disadvantage. Though Alicia was an Imperial Knight, Diablo felt that she could be trusted.

"How long does this 'petrification' last?" Alicia inquired.

"The length of the effect depends on the skill of the one who cast the spell. He should eventually be released when the magic disperses... As long as his body is not broken, that is."

"Will he die if he shattered like that?"

"He would probably survive if it was only his arm or a leg. If it's his head, he's beyond saving."

Though he was the one who said it, Diablo felt a chill run down his spine. No matter who you were, picturing someone's death would

leave a bad taste in your mouth.

After a few more coughs, Rem managed to take a deep breath.

“Phew... That caught me off guard. I was not expecting him to use Subtle Chant...”

“Are you all right, Rem?”

“Yes, thank you very much. You saved me again, Diablo.”

“Hmph...”

He was a little embarrassed as Rem smiled at him. Diablo waved his hand dismissively, motioning to drive Saddler away.

“Get that rockheaded fool out of here. I’m still eating, and leaving that hideous statue in the restaurant will only make the food taste bad.”

“Doubting my character, causing harm to innocent Adventurers... I will be reporting this all to His Majesty. But I should think no one wishes for the death of this Paladin, a supposed servant of the Gods! Leave here, and carry him to the Governor’s mansion at once!” Alicia gave orders to Saddler’s subordinates.

With their boss in the state that he was, there was no way the knights could refuse Alicia’s command. Hoisting up the Paladin who had so readily turned himself into stone, the subordinates carried him outside the building as they fled the restaurant.

—Don’t drop him, guys. He’ll die if you do.

The customers in the restaurant finally came to realize what had just happened. They began to hoot and jeer as the knights left the building.

“Hell yeah! Take that, you damn Paladin! Thinking that you can look down on us Demis!” “We’ve got Sir Diablo on our side!” “Try pullin’ that again and he won’t hold back next time!” “Get the hell out of Faltra!”

The Dwarven girl whose conversation they overheard earlier was looking at Diablo, eyes sparkling.



“He’s so COOL! Strong men really *are* the best after all!”

“What?! I thought you said you were fine with a guy as long as they had money...” The Dwarf slumped his shoulders defeatedly.

—I feel a little bad for the guy, even though I did tell him to die in a fire earlier...

For now, this was one problem Diablo was glad to get out of the way.

Rem took her seat and began eating again, as if the effects from her paralysis had never happened. But Shera still seemed worried.

“Are you sure you’re all right?”

“...It was only a status effect caused by magic, so there should be no aftereffects. If you give me that meat, however, I think I will feel even better.”

“Fine by me, but only if you hand over that cheese!”

Diablo went to start eating again as well, when Alicia came over and whispered into his ear:

“...Are you sure you’re fine with letting Saddler go?”

—Does she think it would have been better if we killed him or something?

Though it is true, offing a guy like that would probably mean less trouble for us down the line... But I’m against killing someone just because they “might” be dangerous, though that may be because my peaceful life in Japan really has made me soft...

Diablo gave a magnanimous nod, as a Demon Lord would. “I don’t care whether an insect like him lives or dies. If he comes to challenge me again, I will not hold back.”

“...Understood. It is true he is no match for someone like you, Sir Diablo. Forgive me for needlessly worrying about you.” Alicia nodded once, a gentle smile on her face.

Chapter 2: Releasing the Seal

After lunchtime—

Diablo and the others had made their way back to the inn.

“...We will need to leave soon if we are going to Starfall Tower,”

Rem spoke up.

“It did take us a while to finish eating because of the nuisance from earlier.”

“Ahaha... That weirdo sure was a handful, huh!”

Diablo nodded, and Shera smiled like she didn’t have a care in the world.

“...I’m sure there aren’t many people who could call a Paladin a mere ‘nuisance,’” Rem sighed.

“I couldn’t care less about that pest. More importantly—” Diablo turned to look at the door.

Alicia was staying in the room next to them. They had all come back together from Pointy Ears... But it was probably impossible to leave without her knowing. She had some sharp senses, and they would have to pass by her room to leave the inn.

Rem appeared to be hesitant about something.

“...I wonder if I should tell Alicia as well.”

“Alicia is a good person, so I’m sure she would understand!”

If you asked Shera, pretty much everyone was a good person from her point of view. Diablo also thought Alicia was trustworthy, of course. He would even call her their friend at this point.

But that was exactly why Rem was conflicted.

“...Alicia is an Imperial Knight... There is no reason she would just turn a blind eye to the Demon Lord being resurrected, no matter what the circumstances might be. It may be better to not trouble her and stay quiet about this.”

Alicia and Rem had become more friendly after talking with each other a while back, apparently finding they had some things in common. Thinking about Alicia’s position as an Imperial Knight, though, it was in both their best interests to keep this a secret.

But Rem thought of Alicia as her friend, which is why she wanted to tell her. To put it bluntly, Diablo had absolutely no idea how to deal with these kinds of delicate relationships; not one clue. What was the right course of action here? How could Rem tell Alicia without ruining their relationship?

It would have been much easier if she was a complete stranger. Rem was close with Alicia, which was exactly why this was so hard. He was no good with stuff like this, so he remained silent in the end.

“What do you think I should do?” Rem asked him.

—*You’re asking me? Asking me how to deal with other people is like asking a turtle how to fly.*

But answering that he didn’t know would be a little pathetic. Instead, Diablo decided to try saying something that “sounded” like good advice.

“You are worrying about it. That is your answer.”

He almost couldn’t believe what he had just said. There was a limit to just how much random nonsense one person could spout.

—But then, Rem nodded as if she had been convinced.

“...I see. True, I would not be worrying about it this much if Alicia wasn’t someone I think I should talk this over with. She is a friend I believe I can trust, and that is why I am worrying... And because she is someone who is causing me to worry about it this much, I should speak with her about it. That is what you are trying to say, yes?”

“Y-Yeah.”

“...That’s just what I’ve come to expect of you, Diablo. Not only are you strong, but you are sensitive to issues like this as well... To you, the answers to my problems must be so obvious they seem like the most trivial things in the world.” The expression on Rem’s face became more cheerful, as if a weight had been lifted from her.

He was starting to feel a little bad at this point. He had only pretended to say something clever, but it was really Rem who had answered her own question. Even Shera was looking at him, her eyes shining.

“You really are amazing, Diablo! It’s just like you said; Alicia is our friend, so she’s sure to understand if we just talk to her about it!”

“B-But of course.”

“...All right. Though this may cause trouble for her, I’ll do it.”

They left to pay a visit to Alicia’s room.

Surprisingly enough, Alicia accepted the whole ordeal without incident. With tears in her eyes, she sympathized with Rem for holding onto this secret for so long, and promised to do everything she could to support her. Rem herself teared up at her kindness, and Shera quickly followed suit.

Their confession went off without a hitch. It was a good thing she had decided to let Alicia know as well.

—*Or at least, that’s how it should be...*

Diablo was leaned up against the wall, arms folded as he watched

the girls shed tears together. It almost looked somewhat...fake.

It felt like he was looking at his classmates back in school right before they changed grades. They would cry, and promise that they would be friends forever... But once the new school year started, they were almost never seen together. He couldn't really tell what they were like on the inside.

The problem Rem faced was life-threatening, and even Shera understood being present for the Demon Lord's resurrection meant risking her life as well—at least, he hoped she understood that. Not to mention that Alicia should be more conflicted about all of this, considering her duties as an Imperial Knight. It had to have taken an inordinate amount of effort for a woman to climb the ranks to reach that position in this world.

The girls' tears weren't fake. He knew that's how it should be... But still, something felt wrong to him.

Diablo sighed.

—But I'm just a guy who sucks at talking to people, has no friends, and hasn't been added to a single group chat on LINE. Maybe I can only see something like this as weird to me...

†

Starfall Tower—

The time was around 8 o' clock in the evening.

In this world, a watch that could be carried around on your person was an extremely expensive luxury item. A pocket watch here was worth far more than its weight in gold. Wall-mounted clocks were only found in places like the homes of the nobility or churches.

Almost all of the townspeople lived their lives according to the bells of the church, which rang out every hour on the hour, from five in the morning to seven in the evening. Five times for 5 AM, six times for 6 AM... Once it reached one in the afternoon, it went back to tolling just the once. Diablo had thought it to be inconvenient at first, but it wasn't like there were train or bus schedules to adhere to, or TV shows to wait for. He didn't have to worry about being late to work or school or anything, so there were no immediate problems.

Inventions that make things more convenient for people—things like precise clocks, public transportation, computers, the Internet—may actually be making it harder for them to live their lives. That's what Diablo suddenly found himself thinking about.

The full moon glowed prominently in the night sky. The ancient stone tower that stretched toward the moon was made in the shape of an octagon, and was thicker toward the bottom of the structure. Including when he had first been summoned, it was Diablo's second

time coming here. It seemed like a completely different place at night.

Diablo and the others stopped to look at their surroundings.

“We came as promised, but...”

“...Where could that Fallen be?”

“N-Nothing’s gonna come out and attack us, right?”

“From what you have told me, I would think we have nothing to worry about... Let us proceed with caution, however.”

Alicia reached toward the sword at her waist. The small figure of a person appeared at the entrance to the tower, emerging into the moonlight.

“Finally, here?”

It was Edelgard, wielding a lance in her right hand. Shera let out a small scream and hid behind Diablo.

—If she was that scared, she should have just waited at the inn...

Rem seemed to be fairly apprehensive as well, while Alicia boldly stood her ground. It was exactly what he would expect of an Imperial Knight such as herself.

The dark-skinned Fallen with silver hair glanced at Diablo and the others, her face completely expressionless.

“Preparations, are finished. For ritual.”

—Huh? She’s not going to ask why Alicia’s here, too?

He had been worried something would happen since they brought an Imperial Knight along, but Edelgard didn’t even bat an eyelash at her.

—I guess she’s so strong that a lone Imperial Knight means nothing to her.

There was no point in him bringing it up and causing more trouble for himself, so Diablo stayed silent. Right now, he should be focused on the ritual.

Stifling the unease inside of him, Diablo gave a confident nod.

“Good work. Now, I assume all that’s left is for Rem and me to complete the ritual?”

“Right. Then, let’s go.”

As always, Edelgard’s peculiar speech pattern made it hard for him to figure out what she was thinking. For a Fallen like her, resurrecting the Demon Lord should be her most ardent desire. It had been thirty years since the last Demon Lord was defeated, so he would at least expect that she was hoping for a new one to come into power. Despite the fact she would be playing a part in such a momentous event for her kind, she seemed rather aloof.

Edelgard ran her eyes over the surroundings, even looking above them for good measure.

“Best, to hurry.”

At Edelgard’s urging, Diablo and the others entered Starfall

Tower.

It was pitch-black. If this were back in the game, this would be the time he'd go to the settings and turn the brightness up to max.

Shafts of moonlight came through the small windows. The glow from the full moon was their only source of light here. Edelgard was at the front of the group, followed in order by Diablo, Rem, Shera, and Alicia.

As they ascended the staircase, Rem posed a question to Edelgard: "...Has something happened? You seemed to be on guard..."

"Followers of Vahl, don't like rituals. Want to break, Demon Lord's vessel, and revive them immediately."

"Mngh..."

Of course Rem would be scared to hear that. It basically meant there were Fallen out in the wild who wanted to kill Rem on sight.

Diablo stroked his chin as he thought. He remembered the name Vahl, a Fallen who had made an appearance in the game. This Fallen looked like a giant bear and had been quite the powerful opponent when Diablo fought against him.

"Are there factions amongst the Fallen as well?"

"There are. Yes. Ones who, just want to kill, other races... They are, Vahl faction. Those ones are, stupid? Only think, about killing. Just, killing."

"I see... Then why do they not go toward the town? There should be people working the farms outside the barrier's reach."

"Vahl followers, move as they please. That's why. But, truth is, they're scared. When Demon Lord, isn't here... Fallen, are weak. They're weak, so don't, want to fight? But still, want to kill, other races."

"So, they're like monsters, then."

—*Basically, reason isn't going to work with those guys. Things are gonna get real annoying real fast if we run into them...*

"Also, Eulerex faction."

"And just what kind of faction might they be?"

"Eulerex, is even older, than last Demon Lord? Eulerex, is oldest Fallen, and most powerful. Apparently. Don't know, for sure. Edelgard, never seen him fight. But, he's passive? Useless. No...not passive, he said. Part of, the moderates? That's what, he said."

"Hmph. Never thought there would be moderates amongst the Fallen."

He knew who Eulerex was, too. From what he remembered, Eulerex had the appearance of a colossal owl. There was plenty a discussion about whether he was a monster or not, but despite how he looked, he was a Fallen capable of speech.

When you met him in-game, it was on a quest where you would

conquer the Fallen's territory. He wasn't much for talking then, and would only say one line of dialogue; something like, "You irksome Adventurers!" and then the battle would start. He didn't give off the impression of a moderate, and he definitely wasn't the strongest.

It was the first time he had heard anything about factions, too.

"Eulerex said, if we just wait, Demon Lord, will be resurrected. So, doesn't move? Won't move!"

"...A moderate Fallen faction..." Rem looked shocked. "I have never heard of anything like that before. I'm sure any of this information would come as a complete shock to the races."

"It seems more likely that you would be executed for fraternizing with the Fallen before anyone would believe you, though..." Alicia added.

Once he heard those words, Diablo finally came to understand the situation here: The races knew almost nothing about the Fallen. Nothing about them was written into the game's setting, either. How many of them were there? What was their chain of command like? How do they live, and how do they increase their numbers?

It was absurd. If the races really wanted to win against the Fallen, they would first have to know their enemy before they could claim victory over the Fallen.

"And which faction do you belong to, Edelgard?"

"Wrong. Edelgard, is Edelgard!"

"So...there are three factions, then."

"Yes. There are, 'outliers,' too, but altogether...about three? Three! Edelgard, talked to Fallen priests. Worked hard, for Demon Lord's, resurrection. Important to, resurrect Demon Lord, properly. Have to make sure, done proper."

Vahl and Eulerex both existed in the game. After enough updates, Edelgard may have been implemented later on as well.

Diablo stared at her, fixated.

—Judging by her looks, they probably would have sold tons of merchandise of her.

He couldn't help but think so.

They finally reached the top of the tower. Because they had been climbing the staircase in pitch-darkness, the moonlight was almost blinding.

It was the place Diablo had been summoned. It was wide enough to not feel cramped, even with the five of them there. An altar stood in the middle of this octagon-shaped space, surrounded by stone pillars. There was no roof here, with the night sky spreading out before them. An enormous full moon hung above them.

The roof of Starfall Tower—

The five of them—Diablo, Rem, Shera, Alicia, and Edelgard—walked toward the stone altar in the center.

Edelgard began to explain:

“To resurrect, Demon Lord, either vessel, has to die. Or must satisfy, soul of, Demon Lord. Has to be given, magic energy... Probably take, another, few hundred years?”

“...So the purpose of this ritual is to give Krebskulm’s soul enough magic energy to satisfy it?” Rem steeled herself.

“That’s, right.”

Edelgard turned to look at Diablo. “You will offer, magic energy. To the, Demon Lord’s soul. If you do, Demon Lord, will revive faster. For sure. Probably. That’s what, Fallen priests said.”

Rem looked uneasy, swallowing quite audibly.

“...I suppose... I have no choice but to believe that...”

They were still left in the dark about far too much. They were woefully lacking in information that would allow them to make any sort of informed decisions, so there wasn’t a clear way to confirm if Edelgard was telling the truth or not.

Rem reached out toward Diablo. She clasped her soft, dainty hands around his own right hand, which still held Tenma’s Staff.

“Wh-What is it?”

“...Diablo... I cannot trust a Fallen after all.”

“I see. Shall we stop, then?”

“No, let’s go through with the ritual. I am sure Krebskulm will revive once we have stored up enough magic energy... But by that time, I don’t know if I will be able to be saved anymore...”

“Hm.”

“...Even so, I do not mind. Defeating Krebskulm is more important to me than my own life, and you just might be able to do that... No, I *know* you will. That’s why I’m placing my faith in you, Diablo.”

She stared at him intently. The look on her face showed she was willing to risk her life over this. She wore the face of someone who had chosen to fight, rather than one living a life in hiding as an incubator for the Demon Lord. She looked radiant as the moonlight poured over her.

Diablo laid a hand on her shoulder. “All that awaits those who dare oppose me is their destruction at my hands.”

He never would have thought he would be saying something like this as a way to put a girl at ease. Though he was acting the part of a Demon Lord, this was also how he truly felt. He *would* defeat Krebskulm. If anything happened to Rem, he wasn’t going to allow Edelgard to get away with it.

“Now lie down. Here!” Edelgard prompted Rem to head toward

the altar.

It was the place Diablo had first opened his eyes when coming to this world.

“...Like this?” Rem laid flat on the altar.

“Good. Now, you.” She turned to look at Diablo. “Put magic energy, into her.”

This was his role here, after all. Diablo did his best not to let the nervousness he felt show on his face.

“Do we not use any kinds of tools for the ritual? You *did* prepare for this, right?”

“At your feet, is magic circle. Amplifies? Magic energy, you give.”

“...Is that all?”

“Need, anything else?” Edelgard tilted her head.

He had been taught how to infuse another person with magic energy by Medios, the owner of the slave emporium, with Shera being his first test subject. It was all fine and well that Diablo just happened to learn this technique...

But if Diablo hadn't known how to infuse magic energy, then this whole ritual would have been a bust. He probably would have felt like running out just to get away from the awkwardness that it would have caused. He was practically jumping for joy on the inside that he had managed to learn it beforehand.

—Edelgard seems like the kind of person who's not very good at planning ahead.

Despite her way of speaking, she did think things through. She was smart and composed, although that may just come with the territory when you were the leader of one of the three Fallen factions. But there were still times when it seemed she acted first and thought later—kind of like now.

Or could it have been that she had information about how Diablo knew of infusing someone with magic energy?

—Is that why she suggested this whole thing?

“Infuse her with magic energy...? That means you're going to have to do *that*, right?” Shera's face turned a scarlet red.

“So it would seem.” Diablo nodded.

“So you *are* gonna do that... I wonder if Rem's gonna be all right...?”

“...I-I am prepared for anything... However, this is a ritual to revive, and defeat, Krebskulm. It is a completely serious affair.”

Shera had poured some of her own magic energy into Rem when they were playing around before, and remembering that experience was probably the reason Rem's face had flushed so red now.

“Y-Yeah. Good luck!”

Shera tried to come closer, but Edelgard stopped her.

“Will disrupt, magic circle. Not involved, then stand back.”

“Aw...”

“Leave it all to me.”

Diablo approached the altar; as he did, the magic circle drawn around it glowed softly, turning a pale-blue color. There were small, densely packed patterns and symbols inscribed on the altar Rem laid upon as well. She was shaking.

“...Heh... When I first decided to become an Adventurer, I was just about ready for anything to happen to me... But, lying within a magic circle drawn by a Fallen while a Demon Lord gives me his magic energy... Now that was completely beyond anything I could have imagined.”

“Just lie there and count the stars. This will be over in an instant.”

—*It will be over in an instant, right?*

Giving magic energy to someone demanded an extreme amount of focus. He had only just learned how to do the technique himself, so he couldn't keep it up for very long. Still, he reached out and touched her body, placing a hand on her stomach. It was pleasantly cool, and felt soft to the touch.

“Ngh...” A small gasp escaped Rem's lips.

“Are you all right?”

“Yes... It just...tickled a little, that's all.”

“If it becomes too much to bear, tell me right away.”

“...All right.”

“Now then...”

Rem wore a two-piece outfit that left her stomach exposed. Laying a hand on her bare belly-button, Diablo started to get a read on her magic energy.

There was a strong torrent of energy that swirled around her heart. It was a completely different pattern than when he had done it with SHERA. He started to pour his magic energy in that stream.

“Hnghhh...?!” A shudder ran down Rem's back.

“Wrooong. That's, wrong,” Edelgard interjected from the sidelines. “That Pantherian, is not, the Demon Lord! Giving magic to her, wrong.”

“Hm. I see...”

He redoubled his efforts to gather information from Rem. Behind Rem's stream of magic energy—there was a thick, dense mass. It was in the inner parts of her abdomen... No, even further than that.

Though he could get a read on something else's magic energy, he wasn't able to tell what color it was... Or at least, that's how it should have been. Right now, he could say without a doubt: This thing was pitch-black. It was as if a bottomless hole had laid open inside of Rem's stomach. It wasn't as if he had experience infusing other people

with magic energy, but at the very least this was different than when he had done it with Shera. Most likely, it was different than what was inside Diablo as well. This was the reason Medios had looked at Rem with such a strange expression before.

“So, this is the spot...”

He started the magic infusion once more. Rem’s body shuddered just like before.

“Mmngh...!!”

“Hm. It’s not reaching...”

Because it was so far away, that made it far more difficult for his magic energy to reach it. About half of what he sent in was redirected to Rem instead.

“That won’t, be enough,” Edelgard said, sounding dissatisfied. “Won’t reach, the Demon Lord? You should try, stabbing, your finger. In her.”

“...Hold on—my finger?”

“Right. Stab! All at once.”

“...I refuse. Though I shall not say I will not allow a single scratch on her... If I did what you are suggesting, it would only endanger Rem’s life.”

“Mmph. Races, so weak. Die, from just a hole, or two... That’s it. A hole. Does she, have one? She does.”

Edelgard moved to the side of the altar and pointed. Though she had been the one to say to not get so close during the ritual, there wasn’t exactly a ritual to interrupt right now, so Diablo didn’t bring it up. More than that, there was a glaring problem with her new suggestion.

“What...are you...?”

“Put finger, in here. Then, won’t have to, stab stomach.”

“Is this some kind of sick joke to you?!”

“Edelgard, hate jokes.”

“...ease...” Rem called out in a small voice.

“...Hm?”

“If it really is necessary... Then please... Do it, Diablo...”

“Ah, erm... Well... Hmm.”

Shera, watching the whole thing unfold, yelled out from the side: “I don’t really get it, but good luck!”

Alicia stayed silent as she watched over them. Diablo responded with a firm nod.

“...Very well. Tell me if it hurts; I will at least wait.” His voice almost broke as he said that.

He reached out once more toward her—to the place that would allow him to get the closest as possible to the being inside of her.

—*This is all to give Krebskulm magic energy...!*

“I’m taking them off.” Diablo reached out to the lower part of her body.

“A-All right...”

He grabbed her spats, sliding them downward and exposing her waist to the night air. He extended his hand to the space between her legs; but he kept his eyes focused on her face, so he could tell straight away if she was in pain—and to not let his gaze wander to where his hand was traveling.

He fumbled around, looking for the entrance inside of her. With a shudder, tears welled in Rem’s eyes.

“Ahn?! ”

“H-Hey?”

“I-I’m fine...It’s just... I’m a bit sensitive there, that’s all...Please, don’t worry about me and keep going. I will make sure to tell you if I can’t take it anymore.”

“I see.”

Rem had said she was fourteen before.

—Is this even all right? ...No, I can’t judge Pantherians by the same standards I would for Humans. According to the setting in Cross Reverie, Elves lived for about 300 years or more. The other Demis probably have the same kind of longevity as well...

Diablo stopped sweating the small stuff and focused on the task at hand.

As she watched from a distance, Shera’s face blushed. “What? What?! This is supposed to be a ritual, right?!”

“Of course,” Alicia answered.

As Diablo’s fingertips finally found their mark, Rem’s back arched.

“Ngh!”

“S-So, here it is...”

“Mnn...ah! Ahh! It... It’s coming in... Diablo...is coming, in...”

“Ah.....” It went in much easier than he had expected.

It was warm and soft, and the inside clung to his finger, coiling itself around him.

He had only gotten the tip of his finger inside, so Krebskulm’s soul was still a ways to go. This was completely different from when he had laid a hand on top of her stomach.

He pushed deeper inside of her. Rem’s breathing grew ever more ragged.

“Ahhhhhn! Ngggh... Mnnnn! Mn! Ah! Hah... Hah!”

“Just a little bit more...!”

Diablo reached as far as he could inside with his middle finger. The warmth from her body spread to him as she tightly wrapped around him. He could feel magic energy as well.

—I’m right next to you now, Krebskulm!

“Here we go, Rem...!”

Raising her hips with just his middle finger, he pushed even deeper inside, and released his magic energy.

“Hyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah?!” A high-pitched scream escaped from Rem’s lips.

The magic energy Diablo released reached to her deepest parts, flowing toward the pitch-black void inside Rem.

Edelgard’s eyes narrowed. “Like, that... Should be, fine...”

“Ah! Ahh! Ahn—hyahh! Nhaaaa!! N-No... Too, rough... No...just like that! Ahhhhhhn! M-My stomach...feels hot... Like it’s, on fire...!”

“We’re not done yet; we need more...!”

Holding nothing back, he poured every last drop of his magic energy into her.

—I’ve already made it this far... I will satisfy Krebskulm, and give them the wake up call they deserve!

The magic circle at his feet glowed with a blindingly intense light—Diablo’s magic energy was being amplified. The massive amounts of it being released inside Rem raged about, stirring around her insides and causing her to repeatedly shudder and tremble atop the altar.

“Hnnngahhhhh! Ahn! Mnn! R-Reaching that far... Ahhhh!

Scraping...inside— Ahhhhn! I-I’m going.... Mm! Going...crazy...! Mnn! Ahhhh... Ahhhhhnnn!!”

“Hah— Hah—”

His vision started to swim from using too much magic energy. A dull pain climbed up his spine, reaching the deepest parts of his head. He started to lose the feeling in his fingers, as if they had melted from Rem’s heat; it was almost like they had become a part of Rem.

But even so, he went further inside her.

“Ngh—”

“Hyaan! Ahn! Ahhhh! Nghhh! It’s hot! Diablo... I can’t...mmgh! This is...going to drive me crazy...! Mnn!”

“Ah... It’s spilling back out...”

The magic energy he poured inside the opening on Rem had started to overflow.

—Looks like Krebskulm’s had their fill...!

For the finishing blow, he poured in the last vestiges of his magic energy.

“Raaaaagh— Take it all...!!”

“Nnnngh! Ahh! Mmmmmgh!!”

Diablo removed his fingers, rubbing along her insides as he did so. Fluid splattered onto the altar.

—Here it comes!!

Something began to emerge from the depths of the hole inside of Rem.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!” Rem let out a pained scream.

What emerged wasn’t an actual physical being—it was a thick torrent of magical energy. It swelled and overflowed from inside her, flowing forth with the intensity of a torrential mudslide.

Diablo braced himself at the edge of the altar. If he was going to err on the side of caution, he would have distanced himself from this spot—but right now, there was someone here he needed to protect.

Since he didn’t know how exactly a Fallen magic circle worked, he couldn’t move Rem around carelessly.

“Hey, Edelgard! Is this really safe?! She seems like she’s in a lot of pain!!”

Edelgard was staring at the torrent of magic energy, as if she was on the verge of crying tears of joy. She looked up to the sky, enraptured.

“Oh... Ohhh... Demon Lord...”

“Tch... She’s not listening.”

She always seemed so aloof and detached from the world, but she had put her life on the line to reach her goals as well. Face-to-face with her success, she was in an ecstatic trance. For an instant—

He was overcome with a sense of vertigo. He had pushed himself, using his MP to the limit. If he let his guard slip for a second, he would fall unconscious. Perhaps due to the current situation, he wasn’t being assaulted with the usual wave of lethargy.

Diablo turned to look toward the ramparts of the tower. Shera could also see the flow of magic energy; trembling in fear, she stared aghast at the gigantic swirling vortex of magic energy.

“Wh-What is this...? Is... Is this Krebskulm...?”

“Yes... This is the true Demon Lord...” Alicia murmured. She was looking up at the sky as well, body slightly shaking.

With what little strength she had, Rem lifted her hand.

“Hah... Hah... Ngh... Hah... Di...ablo...”

“Are you all right?! Hold on, Rem!”

Diablo took Rem’s hand with his left. He gripped Tenma’s Staff in his right hand, ready to protect her at a moment’s notice.

“Mgh... Hah... Hah...”

“Rem—hey!! Open your eyes!!”

Pale and shaking, Rem’s face was slick with sweat.

“Hah... Hah... Diablo... Please... Please, win...”

“Of course I will! I have a duty to see this through for you! I will *not* allow my property to just up and die, understand?!”

“...So...I see...” Though still in pain, Rem managed a smile.

“It’s solidifying!” Shera yelled.

The enormous swell of magical energy that had been released from the broken seal swirled faster, coalescing into a form the Demon Lord Krebskulm would take.

Diablo stood at the ready.

The energy molded into the shape of a gigantic torso, that was thin and long, almost like a snake. Two twisted horns burst forth from the newly materialized head. Two, three—four glittering red eyes opened where their face would be, with one eye in the middle as well.

The surface of their skin was a slick, glossy black, reminiscent of an insect's carapace.

Next grew a pair of arms and legs, finally taking on a somewhat humanoid shape. It was far larger than Diablo, standing about three meters high. Though Diablo was considerably tall when compared to the other races, he only came up to this figure's waist.

From their back sprung forth wings made of pure light, massive enough to almost reach the heavens. They spread their dazzling wings, gently flapping the light.

—It was a colossus wreathed in armor. This was the true form of the Demon Lord, Krebskulm.

Krebskulm laughed. It was a shrill, high-pitched laughter of a woman, rattling the eardrums of all that were present.

Overcome with emotion, Edelgard threw her hands in the air. "OoOooOhh! Demon Lord, resurrecteeed!!"

Her shouts were almost the same as the howling of a beast. Now more than ever, it made him feel like she truly was a Fallen.

Magic energy surged forth from Krebskulm's entire body.

"...We shouldn't... We shouldn't have done that!" Shera's voice was trembling.

"Hah... Hah... This is..." The color in Rem's face grew even more pale, yet her breathing had become more stable. It seemed like what she was going through wasn't completely life-threatening.

"Shera! Alicia! I leave Rem to you!" Diablo shouted.

He reached into his pouch and pulled out a potion flask. It was an MP potion, and not one that he had made in this world. It was the ultimate potion, one that he had made in the game with the rarest of ingredients; it was in his pouch when he first came to this world.

Using it, it replenished his dwindling MP all at once, driving away the exhaustion he had been trying to ignore until now. The haze that clouded his thoughts had now cleared, regained his senses that had been dulled.

"Ahh..."

Diablo readied Tenma's Staff. If he was facing another one of the races, he could get a read on his opponent based on their opening moves—but he knew almost nothing about Krebskulm. Even if he was

one of the top players in Cross Reverie, in this case, he wouldn't understand anything unless he fought her himself.

—It's possible Krebskulm has some kind of "one-hit kill" move, but there's no reason for me to wait around and find out.

In the game, you would be forced to listen to whatever speech the last boss had before fighting them. In this world, there was no reason to play along and wait for them.

He pointed his staff toward Krebskulm, and right as he was about to invoke his magic—

Pssshhhh!!

As if a balloon was deflating, the form of the Demon Lord Krebskulm started to shrink. It was now about the same size as Diablo—no, smaller now. It was even smaller than Shera or Rem. It came down from the air, landing with a thump.

Diablo was so taken aback that he forgot about attacking, and could only stare. The once sinister form Krebskulm had first taken changed dramatically. He did a double take, rubbing his eyes in disbelief.

"It's...a child?"

Krebskulm had now become a young girl.

Two twisted horns grew out of her head, like that of a goat. Her eyes were a deep, amethyst purple, and her braided black hair came down to her waist. She wore a fluttering, frilly dress, but her shoulders and stomach were still exposed. If she wasn't a little girl, it would have been almost lascivious. She was smaller than Rem, and her appearance had all the lovable charm of a small animal. Her ears were long and pointed, like an Elf's, while a reptilian tail dangled behind her.

She was a little girl. Diablo doubted his own eyes, starting to wonder if the ultimate MP potion he drank had been too strong and was making him hallucinate. He turned to look at Rem and the others to see their reactions. But they all wore the same shocked expression on their faces.

—So my eyes didn't deceive me after all...

The young girl—Krebskulm—landed upon one of the walls that surrounded the edge of the tower. Arms folded, she lorded over them with an audacious gaze—though Diablo was still taller than her, despite her elevated position.

"Heh heh heh... So you are the ones who have awakened me from my slumber!"

Her voice was as cute as could be.

Edelgard knelt down. "For Demon Lord's, resurrection... I offer, my sincerest, joy? Joy!"

The girl nodded. "And you are?"

"Edelgard, is called, Edelgard. My lord."

"I see. Very good! I praise you for your revival efforts!"

From what she was saying, this little girl had to be the Demon Lord Krebskulm. She was the enemy Diablo had to defeat; and yet, he hesitated.

It was true Cross Reverie had humanoid enemies appear in-game, from bandits to Fallen. It certainly wasn't the first time he had faced a female humanoid, either. There were no "little girl" enemies in the game, however...

—It's just a theory...but I think there was content that was intentionally removed from the game, just like they did with the references to sexism, race discrimination, and slavery. Maybe they removed her because having an enemy like her would look like child abuse?

As she had looked now, beating up Krebskulm with his magic would look downright cruel to anyone watching. But this world wasn't a game; "defeating" an enemy meant "killing" them. She was a Demon Lord, after all, and defeating a Demon Lord should just seem obvious...

—But, to be honest, I'm kinda against it. I have my promise with Rem to fulfill; and for the sake of the races, I can't just ignore her. That little girl is a Demon Lord here to destroy all the races of this world. She has to be....

...But is that really true?

"Hey. You. Are you truly the Demon Lord Krebskulm?"

"Mm? In the flesh! And just who are you supposed to be?"

"I am Diablo, a *true* Demon Lord from another world. I am the one who revived you... And I am the one who will destroy you!"

"Hm-hmm, that magic energy... I see. So *you're* the one who has awakened me. Good, very good... As a reward, I will teach you the *true* meaning of fear!"

A tremendous amount of magic energy poured forth from her tiny body. The air itself began to warp and twist.

—Despite how she looks, she really is a Demon Lord. It looks like I'm gonna have to fight after all.

Diablo raised Tenma's Staff, twisting his lips into a sneer. Even when confronted with a formidable enemy, a Demon Lord always faced his enemies with a smile!

"Hah hah hah... You're just a Demon Lord who woke up from a nap. How do you intend to teach me anything about fear?"

"Heh heh heh..." Krebskulm smiled, showing her razor-sharp

canine teeth. "Let me see... Yes, I think *that* would be most fitting for the one who awakened the Demon Lord! I will kill you in the cruelest way imaginable!" She exclaimed in grandiose fashion.

It looked like she had thought up a way to fight against him—or perhaps, to execute him. This was an opponent he couldn't take lightly.

—*Should I take the initiative? ...No, judging from her physique, there's a strong chance she's going to use magic.*

He would wait for her to attack, then reflect the spell back and hit her with his own ultimate-tier spell. Diablo had changed gears, completely switching his thought process to battle mode.

—But then, Krebskulm looked a bit confused.

"It's, um... You know, that thing... I should...have this super cruel way to kill you... Hold on a second."

"What's wrong? Why do you hesitate?"

—*Is it because you have too many spells to choose from? I'm expecting you to use a powerful one right off the bat, you know...*

"Wait...! I said to hold on! I'm remembering it right now! Uh, how did it go again...? I know I had something..."

".....Are you saying you don't remember?"

"No! No, no, *no* way! A Demon Lord is a Demon Lord, after all! I have all sorts of knowledge at my disposal! ...Or at least, that's how it should be... But, um... How do I put this? I kinda seem to have...forgotten..."

"You forgot how to fight?!"

"That's not true...! *Enough* with this! I'll burn everything in sight to the ground! That's something a Demon Lord would do, right?!" She was like a child throwing a tantrum.

"Y-You can't do that!" Shera yelled. Those words would never work on a Demon Lord—

And yet, Krebskulm faltered.

"...I can't? Then, what should I do? I can't seem to remember a thing..."

—*She stopped...?!*

Both Rem and Alicia were dumbfounded. Even Shera seemed surprised, and she was the one who said to stop in the first place.

Edelgard's eyes were as wide as the moon above them.

"Demon Lord?! Listening to, other races, wrong? Wrong!"

"Mm? Is it? But she's saying I can't, so, maybe it's a bad thing?"

"What...are you...?"

A look of bewilderment was plastered firmly across Edelgard's face, with everyone present making roughly the same expression.

Diablo had a vague idea of what it could be. This didn't have anything to do with being knowledgeable about Cross Reverie, per se,

but it was a trope you would see all the time in fiction.

—Is Krebskulm missing part of her memories?

Though he didn't know why, it looked like the ritual had only been partially successful.

"The Demon Lord is supposed to be a being who destroys the races... Is that not what you are?!" Alicia challenged.

"Mm? When you put it like that, I kind of feel like that's true..." Krebskulm was deep in thought.

"But why?!" Rem called out to Krebskulm, leaning on Shera for support. "I have always thought it to be strange, but why does the Demon Lord kill the other races?! The Fallen have their own territory where they live, and we do nothing to get in the way of their interests—so what is the purpose of killing the other races?!"

True, Diablo knew nothing of the reason for that either as nothing about it was written in the story for Cross Reverie. There weren't many games that even explained why the antagonists were trying to destroy humanity in the first place.

Monsters existed to attack people, but in this world, the Fallen had divided themselves into their own factions. They certainly wouldn't throw their lives away needlessly by straying too close to towns.

If the races could come to an agreement, like Diablo and the others had done with Edelgard, then the Fallen and races would be able to cooperate with each other. They had even managed to establish dialogue with Krebskulm by doing so.

—Why do you kill the races?—

"Well... that's... I feel like there was a reason for that..."

Krebskulm looked troubled in the face of Rem's question.

"Then do you not want to kill the other races?"

"Hm? Do I...? Maybe I don't..."

"Then please, don't kill them!"

It was an outrageous request to make to a Demon Lord—but Rem was serious.

"I'm asking, too!" Shera added. "Killing people is bad, so don't do it!"

Alicia was, again, dumbstruck.

"Hmm... I can't remember why I wanted to kill them in the first place... So, sure, whatever. I won't kill the races." Krebskulm nodded.

"But if you say you will destroy me," she said as she glared at Diablo, "I *will* burn you to a crisp."

—Is she trying to pick a fight?

To maintain his dignity as a Demon Lord, his only response to a

statement like that would be: "I'd love to see you try." Just as Diablo went to fire off a retort of his own—

In a panic, Rem and Shera jumped into the conversation, cutting him off.

"N-no destroying, no killing, and no fighting from him! Just as long as you don't kill the races...!"

"Th-That's right! Diablo is actually really, super nice!"

After spending this much time with Diablo, the girls had sensed he would strike back with a few choice words of his own, so they cut him off.

—*Nice one, girls!*

"Hm. If you say you don't want to fight, then I see no point in us doing battle." Krebskulm seemed to be satisfied.

Alicia looked as if she had come face-to-face with something truly unbelievable. She had a much more diverse range of facial expression than Diablo first thought.

"...Are you being completely serious...? Is a Demon Lord actually saying they will *not* kill the races?"

"I can't seem to remember the reason why I wanted to kill them, so there you have it. Besides, killing them doesn't put food on the table, and right now, I'm starving."

"E-Edelgard?! Are you all right with this?!"

Edelgard, who had been kneeling the entire time, stood up in response to Alicia's question. She brought her eyes together in an intense expression of displeasure.

—*It looks like she can't agree to the Demon Lord saying she won't kill the races after all.*

Diablo stood on guard. Edelgard, however, cast her eyes downward.

"Don't, really care...about the races? Edelgard, cares about, Demon Lord. Demon Lord, is only thing, that matters," she sighed. "Did not, prepare snacks, for Demon Lord... Edelgard, a failure."

It seemed like she was more lamenting the fact she had nothing to feed Krebskulm.

Edelgard had mentioned before that there were factions amongst the Fallen. The Vahl faction only thought about killing the races, while the Eulerex faction were all supposed moderates. It looked like Edelgard was completely devoted to following the Demon Lord, no matter what, making this an extremely convenient situation for them.

Alicia ground her teeth together. With the sound of scraping metal, she drew her sword.

"Calm yourself, Alicia. It seems that fighting will not be necessary after all." Diablo called out to her.

Alicia ran her gaze over the roof of Starfall Tower. Shera looked

relieved that they didn't have to fight after all, and Rem, whose desire had always been to defeat the Demon Lord, also seemed quite happy that they avoided an unnecessary battle. Her expression had softened compared to earlier.

Edelgard was mumbling to herself, conflicted over if she should leave now to go find snacks for the Demon Lord, and what kind. Diablo had already lowered his staff.

...And then there was Krebskulm, who sighed as she held her stomach.

"Mmnggh... So hungry..."

"Ngh..." Alicia sheathed her sword.

—*Maybe she really wanted to fight the Demon Lord...?*

She was a straight-and-narrow Imperial Knight, so it was possible she was feeling gung-ho about defeating the Demon Lord. Even if they were dealing with one who said they wouldn't kill the races, it was possible Alicia still thought Krebskulm should be brought down. But if her friend, Rem, and their main firepower, Diablo, said they wouldn't fight, then she couldn't just force them to do so. That is what Diablo surmised her feelings to be.

—*She can be a real stiff sometimes... But I guess it's important for us to have someone like that watching out for us, too.*

They couldn't just let their guards down all because the Demon Lord *said* she wouldn't kill them. It was a great possibility that Krebskulm would start attacking as soon as she remembered the true reason why the races were her enemy.

Handing Rem off to Alicia, Shera approached Krebskulm. This wasn't a case of her looking timid but actually being brave...

But maybe it was because she had completely believed what Krebskulm said earlier. Shera was the complete opposite of Alicia; she was almost never wary of others.

"I've got some snacks on me!"

Shera pulled a biscuit from her pouch. It was a disc-shaped confection that was made of hardened wheat-flour. They rarely used butter and sugar for cooking in this world, so it wasn't sweet in the slightest. It might be more appropriate to call it a non-perishable foodstuff rather than a confection.

"What is that?!" Krebskulm's eyes were sparkling.

"They're called biscuits and they're sooo good! See? Yummy!"

While biting into one herself, Shera held out a biscuit to Krebskulm. There was a loud *crunch* as she did so.

"Oho, so these are called 'biscuits,' are they? Then I shall have one! Let's see here..." Krebskulm took the biscuit, biting into it with a crunch of her own.

"They're yummy!" She shouted.

“Right? I’ll give you some more.”

“Ohh! Hand them over!”

“When someone gives you something, you say ‘please’ and ‘thank you,’ OK?” Shera said as she passed the treat along.

“Please thank you!!” Krebskulm was so focused on the biscuits it seemed she hadn’t even heard half of what Shera said.

She stuffed them into her mouth. “They’re so good! Delicious! You! What is your name?! I will make you into the most powerful Fallen the world has ever known!!”

“Ahaha... I’m Shera, and I’m an Elf, OK?”

“So you aren’t a Fallen? Oh well, I still praise you for your biscuit-giving ways!”

“Edelgard is, only Fallen here? Only one!” Edelgard looked unhappy that the role of giving snacks to the Demon Lord had been snatched away from her.

Krebskulm gave an understanding nod. “Then I shall give you power!”

She held her hand aloft, and Edelgard was quickly bathed in the magic energy that Krebskulm released from her small hand. With a burst of energy, Edelgard’s aura changed dramatically. Diablo could feel the intensity from the process crawling across his skin. Though she hadn’t even taken up her spear, this was the same pressure he had felt when Edelgard had used her trump card, 《Sacrificial Charge》.

—*She’s changed that much after receiving power from the Demon Lord?!*

Edelgard knelt down once again. “Ohhh... Edelgard, is honored!”

Though Krebskulm may have declared she wouldn’t kill the races, and looked to be a little girl happily munching away on biscuits... There was no doubt she was a Demon Lord. She could drastically raise the magic levels of the Fallen without any difficulty.



In the past, Diablo had faced down an army of one hundred Fallen who had laid siege to the Bridge of Ulug. His ultimate spell had managed to clear away almost all of their ranks—but if those Fallen had been strengthened by the Demon Lord's magic, he would have had a much harder time claiming victory then.

—Though I don't think I have to worry too much about her right now...

He felt no desire to fight coming from Edelgard. As she was devoted to the Demon Lord, she most likely intended to follow through with Krebskulm's promise not to kill the races.

Diablo walked over to Rem, where Alicia was waiting at her side. "How do you feel?"

"...My body seems to have calmed down now... But I've taken so many surprises today that I can't seem to hold my legs steady."

"Heh, so you're a bit weak in the knees. I'm sure that will heal soon enough. Now, that aside... Can you accept what has happened here?" He lowered his voice as he asked her.

"...My mother... my grandmother... We have all suffered because of the Demon Lord's soul." Rem's eyes were sharp. "I have lived my life with only one goal: to defeat Krebskulm... That is why I cannot accept this so easily."

"I see."

"But, still... If she says she will not kill anyone, then what cause do I have to fight her? If I were to kill her without reason, that would make me no different from a monster myself."

Saying that, she smiled. She looked exhausted, but despite that, she wore that cheerful smile.

Alicia had stayed next to them, listening in silence. It seemed she was wrestling with some complicated emotions of her own, but it looked like she had lost her will to fight.

"There are still things that I am not satisfied about, but this is your choice to make." Diablo nodded.

"Yes."

"It looks like I'll end up only fulfilling half my promise to you."

He had succeeded in removing Krebskulm's soul from Rem's body, but it looked like things would end without him defeating Krebskulm.

—If I were to kill Krebskulm now, it would only make me a monster.

Krebskulm greedily devoured her biscuits. "These are *munch* delicious! *munch munch* So good! *munch* Thanks to this, I finally remembered what my true purpose is!"

"What?!" Shera said, alarmed.

Krebskulm boldly stuck out her almost non-existent chest: "I will devour all the biscuits of this world! That is the reason I was

resurrected!”

—*Like hell that’s the reason you’re here!*

This world wasn’t a game, so peace was for the best here—but if they were to ever put a Demon Lord like this in Cross Reverie, the developers would get flooded with complaints.

The best kinds of enemies in games were the ones you could beat up without thinking too hard about it, and laying a smackdown on them was the perfect kind of stress reliever. But in this world, the Demon Lord wasn’t something made to be an entertaining diversion for the players of some game—she was alive. She was a living, breathing being, one who smiled and...ate biscuits.

Krebskulm turned to ask Shera, “You don’t have any more biscuits?”

“Nope, sorry. But they have all the biscuits you could ever want back in town! They taste even better if you put jam on them, and if you add cream on top of that, they’re the best!”

Shera had an enraptured look on her face as she talked. Krebskulm made a slurping sound as she held back a stream of drool.

She pointed to the east: “Very well! Lead me to where the biscuits are!”

“You’re going to town?! But you’re a Demon Lord!!”

In a haste, Edelgard drew closer.

“D-Demon Lord, should come back, to Demon Lord’s castle, first! That’s, how this works?”

“The Demon Lord’s castle, huh... Are there biscuits at this castle?”

“No? It has...dead flesh, blood wine, and, banquet of screams?”

“You ingrate!” A sharp expression of displeasure crossed Krebskulm’s face. “You’re saying you want *me*, the Demon Lord, to go to a place with no biscuits?! I said my reason for being here was to eat all biscuits, and I meant it!”

“...Ah, well... You, see... Edelgard thought that, Demon Lord’s castle...was most fitting, for Demon Lord? Most fitting! M-My apologies...my lord!”

Edelgard deeply bowed her head. Krebskulm crossed her arms with a snort.

“In recognition of your success in reviving me, I will pretend like I didn’t hear that. I have no need for Fallen who do not obey me, understood?”

“Y-Yes, my lord!” Edelgard prostrated herself, a shocked expression on her face.

Krebskulm grabbed onto Shera’s arm. “All right, lead me to this ‘town’ you speak of!”

“Are we really going?! Is that all right?!” Shera looked around in a panic.

At this point, they had no choice but to take her with them. If they tried to refuse her, that could mean that, this time, they really *would* end up fighting the Demon Lord.

Diablo thought to himself, *Though there’s still a lot I don’t know about the Fallen, there is one thing I’ve learned today—*

Biscuits did not exist in Fallen culture. That much he could say for sure.

†

The group left Starfall Tower, heading outside where the dazzling full moon still shone in the night sky. It was the deep of night; if they started towards Faltra now, they should arrive just as dawn was breaking.

Diablo slowly made his way across the grassy plains. He had ended up carrying Rem under his arm, as she still wasn’t quite able to walk. Keeping his arm wrapped around her waist, Rem had a reluctant look on her face.

“...I can walk, you know?”

“You almost fell over twice coming down the stairs. You’ll only make me worry, and I do not need that right now.”

“...You’re worried about me?”

“Hm? Um, well... Hmph. You are my property, after all. Of course I would worry about my belongings becoming even more damaged.”

“...Yes. Of course you would.” Rem smiled as Diablo blushed slightly.

Behind Diablo—Krebskulm already seemed to be getting along well with Shera, the two of them holding hands as they walked. Though Shera had been afraid at first because Krebskulm was a Demon Lord, thanks to her extremely trusting personality, Shera was smiling along with Krebskulm as they strolled.

Next was Edelgard, a gloomy expression on her face that could roughly be interpreted as: “I can’t believe the Demon Lord was won over with biscuits.” She followed behind them with slumped shoulders.

Bringing up the rear was Alicia, who was making a face as if she had lost the greatest battle of her life. Suddenly, she turned to look up at the sky.

“...Ah?! Sir Diablo, above us!”

“What?!” Reacting to Alicia’s words, he looked up to see a shadowy figure descend from the moonlight.

The sound of beating wings came from above them—an owl, one

that had a single enormous horn growing from its head. But it was huge; from head to tail, it was probably about ten meters long.

—*Is it a monster?!*

But he had seen this figure in the game before. In fact, he had done battle with it, as well.

“Eulerex?!”

A Fallen.

The gargantuan owl made its descent, landing just slightly ahead of Diablo and the others. It started to change into a more humanoid shape, transforming into a giant of a man with the head of an owl. Only covered by a thin shirt, and with muscles dense enough to replace armor, his appearance gave off an aura of intensity.

“Eulerex... Why?” Edelgard muttered.

The owl-headed giant turned to Krebskulm, dropping to one knee. “My humblest of congratulations on your resurrection, Demon Lord.”

The Demon Lord in question only stared blankly back at him, still squeezing Shera’s hand. “What’s with you?”

“I go by that of Eulerex. As an elder Fallen, I am a being who has supported Demon Lords for generations.”

“Oh, are you? Then I’ll give you power, too—”

As Krebskulm went to give Eulerex the gift of her magic power without a second thought, Shera hastily stopped her.

“Y-You can’t do that! You have to make sure he promises not to kill people before you give him your magic energy! If everyone is killed, and all the towns are destroyed, you won’t be able to eat biscuits anymore...!”

“I see. That’s no good, then.”

Since their minds both operated on roughly the same wavelength, Shera had a good grasp on how to control Krebskulm.

Edelgard stepped forward: “Eulerex? Why did, you show up? Business, with Demon Lord? Edelgard, protects her.”

Eulerex was supposed to be the oldest and strongest of the Fallen, and a part of the “moderate” faction amongst them. But ignoring Edelgard, Eulerex continued to speak to Krebskulm.

“I have long waited in anticipation of your resurrection, my liege. I know of no greater elation than being in service to the Demon Lord. I wish to offer a toast to commemorate such an auspicious event.”

Krebskulm looked confused. “I can barely understand a word you’re saying.”

“...My sincerest of apologies. As such, I humbly beg your forgiveness to allow me to be more candid in my explanation. In this case, ‘toast’ would mean... Well, I wish to kill every single one of the races somehow left alive here, as the crowning jewel to celebrate your resurrection.”

Shera froze up with a soft yelp of terror. Diablo had known what was coming from the first words that came out of Eulerex's mouth, so he had already made Rem get behind him. He stood at the ready, Tenma's Staff in hand.

There were about ten paces between Diablo and Eulerex, the perfect amount of space to give a Sorcerer like himself the advantage in a fight. Eulerex held no type of weapon whatsoever; and based on his appearance, it was probably safe to say he was a Brawler-type of Fallen.

Diablo still waited to make his move. He was interested to see what kind of reaction Edelgard would make.

The small Demon Lord stood in front of Shera, spreading her arms wide. "No! You can't kill the races, or I won't be able to eat biscuits anymore! Shera gave me biscuits, you know?! I won't let you kill her!"

"...I see." The eyes set in Eulerex's owl head narrowed. "Keeping a portion of the races alive to procure luxury items... That is most certainly an entertaining prospect. However, I would humbly request you at least increase the number of monsters, and with the largest ones possible."

Diablo had just picked up another tasty piece of information.

—*What...?! So monsters are actually created intentionally by the Demon Lord?!*

According to the races, it was thought that monsters would simply multiply naturally when the Demon Lord resurrected. The same thing was written into the setting of Cross Reverie. If Diablo had access to the wiki right now, he wanted to post this new information with a video to go with it as proof.

"No, no, no!" Shera said, shaking her head. "Monsters attack people, you know?!"

"You heard the Elf." Krebskulm shrugged. "If monsters kill the races, then we'd be better off the less there are of them."

—*She really isn't anything like a Demon Lord is supposed to be... Maybe her way of thinking regressed because she's a child? Or is this another facet of her amnesia?*

Eulerex finally managed to turn his gaze towards Edelgard. "What is going on here? This is the first I've seen of a Demon Lord who did not wish to kill the races. A proper Demon Lord grants magic power to the Fallen, expands the number of monsters, and acts as a harbinger of death to the races... Can she truly be called a Demon Lord?"

"...Edelgard, doesn't get it, either? But, she gave Edelgard, power! So, Demon Lord, is Demon Lord. Edelgard, will follow, Demon Lord's will?"

"You are far too young still. Not only that, but you have yet to fully grasp the gravity of this situation. The Demon Lord is the lord of

all Fallen, a demon who exists to kill the races. They are a bringer of destruction, one whose very presence defiles the land itself. A certain restriction exists for the Demon Lord's soul, as well—as long as this Krebskulm exists, then the true Krebskulm has not been revived.”

“So, what?”

“Those of the Eulerex faction await the resurrection of the Demon Lord in their perfect form.”

“That, so.”

“For an imperfect Demon Lord such as her... I would have her make another revolution along the wheel of death and rebirth.”

He had said it in such a nonchalant manner, but the meaning was clear: This was a declaration of war. And not just toward Krebskulm—Eulerex intended to murder every single one of them here.

In an instant, the elder Fallen closed the distance between them. Crossing what should have taken ten steps in a single stride, he raised his right fist to smash it into Krebskulm. Right before the impact, however—

Edelgard threw herself into the fray, catching the blow with her spear. A thunderous shock wave radiated outward from their clash.

“Ngh... Your faction, does whatever, they want... Nothing more, important, to the Fallen, than will of, the Demon Lord! Nothing!”

“The Fallen have their own role to play in this world. You have merely abandoned your duty, *and* your purpose. Your rash and foolish actions have brought about this imperfect Demon Lord's resurrection...and I shall be the one to rectify it!”

The giant owl-man hybrid lunged at Edelgard with a ferocious kick. Edelgard used her spear as a shield to block the attack.

Shera had grabbed Krebskulm by the hand and was running towards Diablo, screaming all the while.

“AUGHHHHHH!!”

“Aghh! Aghhhh!!” Krebskulm may have just been yelling as an attempt to imitate Shera's screams, but it looked to Diablo that the little Demon Lord was having the time of her life.

Diablo was protecting Rem, who couldn't run anywhere, which is why he couldn't move. Shera and Krebskulm finally made it over to him.

“Ahhhhhhh!! The Fallen! Went kaboom!”

“Ahaha! Ka-BOOM!”

Tears in her eyes, Shera was blurting out things that barely made sense, while Krebskulm laughed happily alongside her.

“Leave this to me.” Diablo made them take cover behind him. “Hey, Alicia!”

“Y-Yes!” Sword already drawn, she had snapped out of her slump, and was back to her normal self.

—*Good, she seems all right now.*

“Protect Rem and the others. It doesn’t seem like he’s getting any closer for now, but this guy is supposed to be one of the most powerful Fallen, after all.”

“U-Understood!”

†

Edelgard thrust her spear toward Eulerex.

“Fallen, rebelling against, Demon Lord! Strange! Not, right!”

Eulerex had deflected the blow with his tree trunk-like arms, but a spurt of blood flew from a wound on his face.

“Hm?! I see... So you spoke the truth when you claimed to have received power from the Demon Lord. However, your movements are still far too slow!”

A consecutive three-punch assault from Eulerex broke through Edelgard’s defense.

“Agh?!”

Usually after taking a huge hit like that, the impact would cause some space to open between you and the assailant—but Edelgard just crumpled to the ground where she stood.

—*What the hell is going on here?*

Collapsing in front of her enemy, Edelgard was left completely defenseless, with Eulerex raining blow after blow upon the downed Fallen.

—*I don’t really have any obligation to save her, but...*

Choosing a spell with low power and high accuracy, Diablo cast his magic: “《Bit Arrow》!”

Aiming at Eulerex’s head, he sent an arrow of light speeding towards the Fallen. Reacting to Diablo’s spell, Eulerex leapt out of the way, Diablo managing to protect Edelgard from his follow-up attack.

—*Tch, he dodged it like it was nothing...*

Elite Fallen such as Eulerex were far more resilient when compared to the rest of their brethren. It seemed the reason he had been able to dodge Diablo’s attack was because of his heightened agility. Even the governor of Faltra, Galford, had managed to avoid Diablo’s spells in their battle a not too long ago. If it weren’t for that, Diablo might have been shaken up at this turn of events.

Eulerex fixed his ire upon Diablo. “So, a halfling such as yourself believes he can face off with an actual Fallen!”

“Heh heh heh... For someone who claims to have lived as long as yourself, it seems you are nothing but a birdbrain if you are oblivious to who I am!”

“Me? Lacking in knowledge?”

Diablo slammed Tenma’s Staff into the ground:

“I am the Demon Lord Diablo! How *dare* you oppose a true Demon Lord, you ignorant cretin!”

Eulerex’s golden-colored eyes widened, emphasizing the black pupils within them.

“A...Demon Lord?”

“You claim to be one of the oldest Fallen, yet you do not know of me...? You should be ashamed of your own ignorance!”

—Of course he wouldn’t know who I am... I’m just some guy who role plays as a Demon Lord in the game he plays.

But even if it was just an act, it only meant he shouldn’t be thinking about things like that all the more. Diablo had made it known that anyone who did not know of him was ignorant, and that was all there was to it.

Eulerex bent his neck, twisting it so it was perfectly horizontal with the ground.

“You utter fool—an inferior race such as yourself, claiming to be a Demon Lord... I will provide a death fitting of your arrogance.”

“Hmph... Then I shall *make* you understand my true power!”

“If you claim to be a Demon Lord, then why cooperate with the races? Why protect this failure of a Demon Lord?”

“These are all my possessions. All that awaits those who would cause harm to my property is their destruction by my hands!”

Alicia was not actually one of his “possessions,” but a friend; and though he couldn’t exactly call Krebskulm the same, explaining every last detail of their circumstance was a chore he would rather avoid doing.

Having apparently recovered from the previous beating she took, Edelgard once again took up her spear.

“Edelgard, not your possession? No! Serve, Demon Lord!”

“Hmph... Your ‘Demon Lord’ Krebskulm seems to be more of a *prisoner* to biscuits, is she not?”

“Mmph.”

“Leave this to me,” Diablo declared. “I will take care of this muscle-headed birdbrain.”

He pointed Tenma’s Staff towards Eulerex: “《Flare Burst》!!”

A sudden explosion occurred right under Eulerex’s nose; an attack to see what he was made of.

Flare Burst was the highest-tier spell one could learn at level 99 or lower. In other words, it was merely the spell you learned right before breaking the level cap. It wasn’t even that powerful compared to the rest of Diablo’s arsenal of magic. But it was a good way to restrict his MP usage, and it activated quickly to boot.

Above all else, the damage was focused to only a small area; he

had allies around him, so this was important. Though its range was more restricted, it was still wider than the last spell he used, Bit Arrow, and its activation time was dramatically reduced as well.

—*There's no way he could've avoided that!*

“Raaaaaaargh!!”

Eulerex came charging headfirst out of the smoke. There were burns on his shirt and skin, but it hadn't hindered his movements in the slightest.

A look of shock overtook Diablo's face. Then, as soon as Eulerex had almost reached directly in front of Diablo—

《Super Mine》 activated, a spell that was cast onto the ground itself, and was particularly effective against opponents who liked to fight in close quarters combat.

The explosion engulfed Eulerex. Diablo's look of surprise earlier was just a ruse, to make Eulerex think there were no traps waiting for him.

The pressure from the sudden detonation made the Fallen's legs buckle, and scorched his body. But even still, he pressed forward, fists outstretched.

“This is far from over yet!!”

“A stubborn one, aren't you...!!”

This time it came as a genuine surprise to Diablo—but he was someone who had already experienced countless battles before.

Instinctively, he had already kicked off the ground and jumped backward, creating a space between him and Eulerex to stay out of reach of the Fallen's fists—

“《Quartz Lance》!!” Eulerex suddenly shouted.

A semi-transparent, razor-sharp spear made of crystal had formed around his rugged fist.

—*So this guy was a 《Brawler Sorcerer》, too!*

However, Diablo was in possession of the Demon Lord's Ring. Just like always, it had sent his opponent's magic flying back to them.

“Argh?!”

Having his surprise attack returned in full-force, the crystalline lance punctured the left side of Eulerex's chest. No matter how resilient a Fallen he was, even Eulerex had to stop after taking an attack like that.

Diablo once again put some distance between him and Eulerex. Edelgard was next to him, looking shocked.

“What...was, that?!”

After seeing Eulerex withstand his spells, suddenly explode, and even take damage from his own Quartz Lance after it was reflected back to him—there wasn't any way for her to know what had just happened.

With a self-confident chuckle, Diablo's mouth twisted into a warped smile. "This is the power of a Demon Lord!"

Eyes open wide, Edelgard gasped in admiration.

Smoke rising from his body, Eulerex fixed his gaze on Diablo. "...My spell...was reflected...? Do you mean to tell me...that was 'Magic Reflection'...? The very same power possessed by Lord Enkvaros?"

"Oho, so you realized my power after only seeing it once."

Diablo had received the "Demon Lord's Ring" as a reward after defeating Enkvaros back in the game, an item with that housed the power of "Magic Reflection." It would also reflect healing and support spells as well, so it wasn't without its own drawbacks.

"...Can it be...he is a true Demon Lord...?" Eulerex sputtered. "No, that is impossible... A Demon Lord exists to obliterate the races!!"

He started to gather energy into his right fist, glowing as he infused it with SP.

—Looks like he's trying to come at me with a technique that'll take a while to activate... But it'll do massive damage, too.

"Hmph, I have no reason to wait for you! 《Lightning Bullet》!"

"Now is the time! Do it!!" Eulerex shouted.

—What?!

Diablo had spent his time in Cross Reverie living the grueling life of a solo player. He would fight by himself, and protect only himself. He was undefeated, a player acknowledged to be the best by not only himself, but others, too.

—But right now, there were people he needed to protect.

"Wait!!" Edelgard screamed.

Krebskulm and the others were watching Diablo, expressions of concern etched on their faces. Behind them, a Fallen had appeared from seemingly out of nowhere; Eulerex was the leader of his own faction, so this had to be one of his followers.

Diablo wasn't able to move freely the instant after launching any one of his more powerful spells, which meant that suddenly switching targets was impossible for him.

Edelgard had already taken off at a sprint toward Krebskulm and the others.

The bullets of light Diablo had fired from his previous spell bore into Eulerex's abdomen, exploding from inside him and blowing away half his body. Though that should have been a fatal blow—

Eulerex had managed to activate one of his Martial Arts—his target: Edelgard, who was desperately trying to reach Krebskulm.

"Hnnгааah!!"

Eulerex, his body covered in lightning, rammed straight into Edelgard. She had managed to take the attack with her spear, but with a dry, cracking sound—her lance shattered.

“Nrgh?! Aghhhh!!”

Edelgard was blown away. With a flash of purple lightning, her blood danced in the air. She crashed along the ground, kicking up a cloud of dust as she tumbled.

Eulerex had lost half his torso; his arm was bent in an exaggerated direction from overuse; and his entire body was scorched to a crisp. But even still, he stood proudly; his victory had been all but assured.

At the same time—

The Fallen from Eulerex’s faction moved to attack Krebskulm. It was a veritable monster, possessing the head of a wolf, and a slew of snakes in lieu of arms. It drew closer from behind Krebskulm and the others.

Shera had been the first to notice, and let out a scream. Turning around to look, Krebskulm froze when she saw it. Alicia was late in reacting, and no longer had the time to even ready her sword. As for Rem—she had thrown down a crystal.

“《Stoneman》!!” An enormous stone obelisk stood in front of the Fallen, blocking its path; it was her Summon.

The countless snake heads that tried to sink their fangs into Krebskulm found themselves with a mouthful of hard stone instead. But this was a Fallen entrusted by Eulerex with eliminating a Demon Lord, one of the most powerful Fallen in existence. Its strength was most likely up to task for an assignment of that magnitude. As such, Rem’s Summon was crushed by the multitudinous snakes, shattering it to pieces.

But it had already bought them just enough time—Alicia and Shera had grabbed Krebskulm by the hands, pulling her to safety. Rem was a good distance away as well.

Diablo unleashed one of his ultimate-tier spells, catching the wolf-headed Fallen by surprise and erasing him from existence.

†

After losing half his torso from Diablo’s attack, Eulerex had regressed back to his initial giant owl form.

“...To think an insignificant Summon would be able to hinder my plans.”

Surprisingly enough, there were no wounds to be found on the owl’s body. It was possible that the damage Diablo had done still remained, however.

Diablo pointed Tenma's Staff at him. "Leaving one of your subordinates lying in wait for an ambush... Though you may act all high and mighty, that's quite the underhanded tactic, wouldn't you say?"

"...If you were not present, I would have destroyed her from the very beginning. Such overwhelming magic energy... I cannot fathom for it to be coming from one of the races."

"I have already told you: I am a Demon Lord. I thought you merely a fool, but perhaps you're senile instead?"

"This cannot be... And yet, that strength is not normal. Inconceivable... Inconceivable... Inconceivable..."

Eulerex spread his wings. Stirring up a cloud of dust, he propelled himself into the air.

—You're just gonna run away?! I mean, I could try pursuing him, but...

He took a quick glance around him. If Eulerex were to assault him with a wide range attack that wasn't a spell, the only way he could protect the girls was to have Rem use one of her Summons as a shield. Since her largest Summon, "Stoneman," had just been destroyed in that last attack, she wouldn't be able to use it for a while. Edelgard looked like she had taken heavy damage as well. She was just now beginning to pick herself up off the ground.

There was no need for Diablo to go rushing after a fleeing enemy. Eulerex was practically inviting them to launch a counterattack. As long as he didn't lose anyone on his side, Diablo was fine with the outcome.

Diablo lowered his staff. "Hmph... I have lost interest in you. I couldn't care less about a fleeing coward."

He left Eulerex with that harsh remark, since showing any kind of weakness to him went against everything he pretended to be here.

No matter how knowledgeable or skillful you were, any fight against an intelligent opponent was a dangerous one. If Eulerex had gone after Diablo's allies instead of Diablo himself, then the number of ways he could protect them would be severely limited. Even if he was acting like a Demon Lord, Diablo didn't actually want to kill anyone.

Eulerex disappeared into the night sky, and everything grew silent once more.

"Shera, do you sense any other Fallen around?"

"N-No, I don't think there are any more around here... Though it's true that I was late in noticing that last one."

"At this rate, it wouldn't be strange for Vahl's faction to show up as well. Keep your guard up."

"G-Got it." Shera squeezed Krebskulm's hand tight as she

answered.

The young Demon Lord in question, who had just faced an attempt on her life, didn't seem fazed at all by the previous battle. Instead, she wore quite a lively expression on her face.

"You were the one who protected me earlier?"

"Huh? I suppose...you could say that, considering what just happened." Rem nodded slowly.

Krebskulm must have been referring to when Rem used her Summon to block the wolf-headed Fallen's attack.

"Then you deserve my praise. Good work!"

"...Why *did* I end up protecting you, I wonder?"

"Hey now, I'm praising you here," Krebskulm proclaimed self-importantly. "You should be bowing your head in thanks to me!"

"That's not right," Shera chided. "At times like this, you should be saying 'thank you.'"

"Even though she doesn't have any biscuits?"

"You say it when you're happy about something someone did for you!"

"I will never understand the races, I swear... Well, no matter. There's no point in saying anything if you don't choose your words based on who you're talking to, after all."

"Good girl!"

Watching this exchange, Rem had a conflicted expression on her face, as she had long sought to defeat Krebskulm. Though Krebskulm had promised to not kill any of the races, none of them knew what would happen if she suddenly regained her memories as a Demon Lord.

But even then, Rem had immediately moved to protect her—why was that? She still didn't have an answer to that question.

"You must have wanted to protect everyone from the bottom of your heart." Alicia smiled gently. "I am sure that is the reason why you sprang into action, Miss Rem."

"...Perhaps you are right."

"The difference between an experienced Adventurer and myself is quite something, isn't it... When the moment of truth came, I was petrified."

"...I was no different, really. It was my Summon who did the fighting."

It seemed both Rem and Alicia had managed to calm down somewhat.

Diablo turned his attention towards Edelgard. "You still alive?"

"No, problem. Edelgard, is fine."

Looking at the Demon Lord being friendly with the other girls, Edelgard sighed.

“...Demon Lord, was tricked...”

“That is not my fault, I will have you know.”

“I, know. But, still... Not satisfied? Reason why, didn’t kill, races, from beginning... Take Demon Lord, back to castle... That is, your fault?”

Her way of thinking was not all that different from Eulerex. She did, however, have the composure to understand her situation and her own power, and even when to have the self-restraint to avoid a fight.

“Edelgard, want to protect, Demon Lord. But Edelgard, can’t go, near town.”

“So it seems.”

They should be able to scrape by if they hid Krebskulm’s tail, and maybe her horns, too, for good measure. On the other hand, Edelgard may have been beautiful, but she also had scaly skin and a pair of reptilian eyes not found amongst any of the races. If she were to come close to Faltra, people would quickly come to realize she was a Fallen.

Edelgard knelt down once more in front of Krebskulm. “Demon Lord... Edelgard, cannot accompany, you to town? Will be, in forest. Please call me, at any time.”

“Right, good work today!”

“Someday... Please come, to Demon Lord’s, castle. That is, wish, of all Fallen.”

“But Eulerex is at this castle too, is he not?”

“That, is...”

“It is my destiny as the Demon Lord to eat biscuits at this ‘town’ they speak of. I will not let anything stand in my way!”

“...Under, stood. If it is, will of, the Demon Lord!” Edelgard gave a deep bow of respect to Krebskulm. Dragging herself off the ground, she staggered back to the forest.

As he watched her forlornly trudge away, Diablo had felt some sympathy for her—but they just couldn’t get her into the town. Not only that, but given the opportunity, it seemed Edelgard wanted to kill Rem and the others and take Krebskulm back to the Demon Lord’s castle. Diablo was uneasy about keeping her close by, if only due to that. That was one conflict of interests they just wouldn’t be able to get around.

Diablo started to walk towards town, with Rem following after him.

“Are you all right now?”

“...After being attacked by a Fallen, I don’t think I have the luxury of saying that I feel a bit weak in the knees anymore. Putting that aside for now... You truly are a force to be reckoned with, Diablo. Eulerex is supposed to be one of the most powerful Fallen.”

“He was a bit more tenacious than I had expected him to be. Smarter, too. If he had received power from the Demon Lord on top of that, it would have been a much more arduous fight.”

Alicia came besides them, a wry smile on her face. “Even then, you would call it an ‘arduous’ fight rather than a ‘defeat,’ I see.”

“Of course. I *am* a Demon Lord from another world, after all. I will not lose to any Fallen.”

“Time for the biscuit song~ ♪” Shera was walking hand-in-hand with Krebskulm.

“What’s that?!”

“When I was walking alone in the forest at night, I would sing this song so I wouldn’t be afraid. It’s a lot more fun when everyone sings along! ♪ The ‘B’ of biscuit is for the ‘Best!’ ♪ The ‘I’ is for ‘Incredible!’ ♪”

“B, B! Stands for B!” Krebskulm’s delighted laughter rang out as she sang along.

Diablo and the others left Starfall Tower behind them.

Chapter 3: Going to a Café

It was late at night when the group had finally crossed the Bridge of Ulug. It seemed the flashes of light from their battle with Eulerex could be seen from here, and the sound of the explosions had even reached the fortress as well. Due to this, they were subjected to a slew of questioning. Diablo simply replied that a monster appeared, so he had fought it off using his magic.

The soldiers posted here at the fortress were indebted to Diablo since he saved them from the army of one hundred Fallen that had marched on the Bridge of Ulug. He managed to earn their trust because of that, and the guards let Diablo and the others through without any interference.

The walls of the city of Faltra came into view. There were sentries posted at the gates that led into the city as well, and if they were to search Krebskulm, things could turn sour extremely fast. They could pass off her Elvish ears and purple eyes as her being a Demi—

However, her horns and tail stood out too much. They borrowed Alicia's cloak and had it draped over Krebskulm like a robe in order to hide her appearance.

"Mmmngh... Why does a Demon Lord such as myself have to wear this?"

"It's because they won't let you in if they find out you're a Demon Lord."

Krebskulm gave a reluctant nod in response to Shera's explanation. Rem, on the other hand, seemed uneasy.

"...Alicia is with us, so I'm sure it will be all right..."

"Please, leave it to me," Alicia replied, gently smiling.

—As long as we have an Imperial Knight with us, the guards will probably give us a free pass just by association.

Now the only thing left for Diablo to do was act all high and mighty like a Demon Lord, while simultaneously blending in and doing his best not to draw any unwanted attention from the guards.

"A word regarding Miss Krebskulm..." Alicia began to offer a suggestion. "Even if we take every precaution to hide her at the city gates, would it not be problematic to call her by name in the town itself?"

It seemed this could very well turn into a big problem for them. The name “Krebskulm” was well-known amongst the races as being the name of a Demon Lord.

“...If anyone were to call one of the races by that name, I’m sure it would be reported to the Church.” Rem nodded.

“So I see...” Diablo sank into thought.

—It may have also been possible that you couldn’t name your character “Krebskulm” back in the game... They did something similar with the name “Greenwood,” after all.

“I know, I know!” Shera’s hand shot high into the air. “How about ‘Klem’?”

—Shortening “Krebskulm” down to “Klem,” huh... It’s a little simple, but at least it’s better than “Kreb” or something.

“...It’s better than something completely unrelated to her original name, I suppose,” Rem said with a shrug. “This way, it might also be easier to play it off if we accidentally use her real name.”

“I will respect everyone’s opinions on the matter.”

“Do whatever you like,” Diablo spoke, giving his usual magnanimous nod. The truth was that he had no confidence in giving her a new name, and having his suggestion shot down by the group would make him look lame.

Shera gave herself a round of applause. “Then it’s settled! From now on you’re ‘Klem,’ OK?”

“Hmm. I may be a Demon Lord, but when we’re this close to the biscuits, I do not care of trivial matters concerning how you address me. I will allow it.”

“Ehehe! Then let’s get along, Klem!”

“Very well!”

“I kinda feel like I just got a new little sister! I’ve always wanted one, you know? Elves don’t actually have all that many children...”

They approached the gates of Faltra while still talking, the morning sun already rising into the sky. Because they had been walking to match Krebskulm’s pace, instead of arriving at the break of dawn, it was already time for the morning market to start business for the day.

They passed through the city gates. Unlike their venture to Starfall Tower, which had led to one unexpected event after another, the greatest enemy Diablo and the others faced now was a battle against their own sleepiness as they made their way back to the Peace of Mind Inn.

It was a relatively featureless room, with only one bed in the center big enough to accommodate three people. Diablo wanted to collapse on the bed and fall asleep right away. He hadn't used *that* much magic, but it was a fact that he used up a sizable chunk of his MP. Having to force himself to stay alert from one situation to the next left him mentally exhausted.

But he couldn't just make a beeline to the bed.

"...Where should we have Klem sleep?" Rem asked.

"Isn't here fine?" Shera looked at Rem curiously as she patted the bed.

It was a simple bed with sheets thrown over some straw, but it was big enough to hold them all. Having four adults squeeze into it would be a bit of a tight fit, but three adults and child should be doable.

Rem turned to look at Klem. "...Having a Demon Lord sleep in a bed at the inn? Ah, well... I suppose Diablo is a Demon Lord as well, isn't he."

Hearing that, Klem looked up at Diablo. "Oho? So you sleep here, too?"

—'Cause we're flat broke.

But he couldn't answer her with that, so he snorted instead.

"I am not such a fool who thinks sleeping in an important-looking place *makes* me important, you see. Though the royalty and aristocracy of the races may spend large sums of money on lavish homes and furnishings, I find that to be completely idiotic."

"Yeah, you're right!"

"Heh—aren't I, though?"

"Who cares about where we sleep! Just as long as someone brings us biscuits!"

—I'd much rather you didn't lump me together with you on that one...

At the very least, he had made it through the conversation without being made fun of for being a dead-broke Adventurer.

"It is true that many use their appearance and dwelling to show the value of their worth as a person." Alicia nodded, looking at Diablo in admiration. "But I, too, find that to be a foolish endeavor. As I would expect from you, Sir Diablo, you see things for what they are truly worth."

"O-Of course."

—She's taking me way too seriously here...

Shera flopped onto the bed with an audible **fwump**.

"I like this waaay much better than some fancy-pancy bed. It feels a lot warmer when everyone's close together here!"

"...As long as you all don't mind, then I suppose it's fine..." It was barely noticeable, but Rem's shoulders were shaking.

—I guess anyone would be against suddenly sleeping in the same bed as the mortal enemy they had risked their life to defeat.

“Rem, you shall borrow Alicia’s room for the time being. It would be too cramped to have four people in the same bed, after all.”

“Huh? But...”

“Stay there until you are used to this arrangement.”

“...I suppose you’re right.” She looked troubled up until now, but an expression of relief had finally crossed Rem’s face.

Now that he thought about it, he hadn’t gotten permission from the person who actually owned the room Rem would be staying in. He was always bad at planning out things like this.

“You do not mind, I assume?” Diablo asked Alicia.

—Aaand now I’ve gone and asked her in as heavy-handed a way as possible. Great. I hope I didn’t make her mad...

Alicia gave a deep bow. “Being able to help in this way is an unexpected joy. Please feel free to use my bed, Miss Rem.”

“...I am fine with the floor. I’m an Adventurer, so I’m used to it.”

“Please, I insist. It is an Imperial Knight’s duty to protect the people.”

“You shall both sleep in the same bed, and you will like it!”

Diablo flicked his hand to drive them from the room.

“...Mmgh.” Rem’s face flushed red.

“As you command, Sir Diablo.” Alicia gave another respectful bow.

“...I’m sorry, Alicia.”

“It really is all right. Please, do not worry yourself over it.”

With those parting words, the two girls left the room.

“Phew...”

Setting down Tenma’s Staff and removing his Curtain of Dark Clouds, Diablo stretched out on the bed. Having finally been given the chance to relax, his body felt like lead.

“You OK?” Shera peered into his face.

“Yeah. This is just because I used some of my MP...”

A good night’s rest should be enough to take care of something like this. It was different this time around, compared to when he had beaten back the army of Fallen or fought with the Elven troops. Eulerex was indeed a formidable foe, but he had only gone one round with the Fallen, and he had already recovered the MP he had given to Krebskulm with an MP potion.

Klem had climbed up onto the bed as well. She removed her cloak, and was back to looking the same as when they had first met her.

“What’s wrong with him?”

“When Diablo uses his magic, he gets tired and loses his energy,” Shera explained. “He did his best fighting for us all out there.”

“Hmm... Now that you mention it, it seems both the Fallen and the races lose magic energy when they use spells, strangely enough.”

“Is it different for you, Klem?”

“Of course it is! I *am* a Demon Lord, you know! Magic energy just keeps flowing out from deep inside me for some reason!”

—*What the hell’s with that? Isn’t that cheating even more than my “Magic Reflection?”*

So began the thoughts that crossed his mind as he was teetering on the edge of consciousness.

—*I thought the Demon Lord was strong because they had stored up magic energy for hundreds of years or something, but I guess that’s wrong. Maybe it’s something completely different... Like, they’re some kind of engine or something...?*

No, that doesn’t sound right, either...

He thought he would be able to draw a comparison to something back from his old world, but was having trouble thinking straight. And it wasn’t because of how much MP he lost; he was just plain tired. Not only had he pulled an all-nighter, he had walked for a total of ten hours yesterday; not to mention the ritual and all the fighting piled on top of that. If this was his old body, he would almost certainly be dead by now.

—*I just want to go to sleep...*

Shera began to remove her clothes: “There we go.”

“...What.”

“You feel better when I do this, right, Diablo?” Having stripped down to her underwear, she clung to him, her soft skin pressed up against his own.

“What are you...?!”

“Oho, I see. So that’s how the races give magic energy to each other... You’re an interesting bunch, aren’t you.”

“Magic energy? No, it’s a little different from that. Do you wanna try, Klem? Doing this makes me happy, too.”

“What?! Even you as well?!”

“Yeah! Diablo will be happy, and so will I! It’s a win-win for everybody!”

—*Stop it, seriously!!*

“Very well, then let’s give it a try!”

Klem began removing her clothes as well. As soon as she touched them, they wriggled and fell off her as if they had a mind of their own. Her skirt and sleeves still remained, but everything from her stomach upward was completely bare.

There was no curvature to be found on her chest, and he could see

the vague outline of her ribs as well.

—*While she's supposed to be a Demon Lord, she isn't all that different from a Human. Although the only girls I've seen like this were all Demis...*

"Hmm, like this?" She pressed her flat chest against Diablo.

Her skin came into contact with his, a shock running across his back.

—*What is this feeling...?!*

When Shera and Rem touched him, they felt warm and soft, and it made his heart start beating incredibly fast. Though it was a little embarrassing, it would get his blood pumping and boost his spirits.

—But with Klem, it was different.

"Mmm, something like this?"

The strength left his body; he was no longer able to move. Shera didn't seem to notice yet, and was still smiling, as happy as could be.

"That's right, just like that! If you keep pressing up against him, he should be feeling better in no time."

"Hmm, I'm starting to have fun with this as well!"

Klem's skin almost felt like it was clinging to him. It was as if an electric current was running through him, traveling along his spine and reaching all the way to the deepest recesses of his brain; a similar feeling to when he had drunk his MP potion from earlier.

"Ngh..."

"Heehee, what's wrong? Letting out a moan like that... Do you like this, perhaps?"

Klem pressed her body against his arm, nuzzling against him. As she rubbed her skin against his, he was assaulted by an abnormal sensation.

"Grk..."

"I see... This is fun."

There was a mischievous look in Klem's eyes as she smiled. It was an alluring expression that no child would make.

She began tracing her fingers over the back of his neck. As she touched him, it was like fire and ice being pressed onto him at the same time. It was an intense stimulation, as if he was on the receiving end of an electric shock.

"Ngh... Hng..." Diablo felt like he had been bound by chains; he couldn't move.

"Hehe... This thick neck...your well-featured chin...your flawless eyes... It's almost like someone created you to look this way."

"Mgh, well..."

It was true Diablo's appearance wasn't real, as it was just his avatar from the game.

"This is what you like, right? Mm... Mm..." Klem was starting to pant.

Still clinging to Diablo's arm, she moved herself up and down, over and over, as she rubbed against him. The strange stimulus washed over him like incessant waves, crashing into him again and again. His own breathing became more ragged—before he knew it, Shera was on his other arm, moving similarly like Klem. Her face was flushed a crimson red as she rubbed against him, taking short gasps of air as she moved.

"Mm... Hah... Hah... How is it, Diablo...? Do you feel...better now?"

"Y-Yeah, I—"

"It's not over yet. We have to...do more...!"

Klem gripped him tighter, as if she was in a trance, and began moving faster, and faster. Her gasps quickly became faster and more high-pitched, with Shera almost mimicking her—

"Hahn! Ah... This... This feels amazing... Everything...is going fuzzy..."

"Ah, mnn! Ahh... It feels like...magic energy, is flowing into me. Diablo, I... I can't... It's...nngh! It's overflowing!"

"Grh!" Diablo grit his teeth.

"Ah! Ahn!" Shera's back was as straight as an arrow. "The magic energy... it's overflow— Mng, ahhhhhhh!!"

"Something... Something's coming! It's coming! F-From deep...inside me...! Mmgh!" Klem's body started to tremble.

Because he was still in contact with her, Diablo could feel precisely what was happening. An inconceivably large expansion of magic energy was welling up inside Klem, and this wasn't the magic energy he had given to her during the ritual, either. If the average Sorcerer could be said to have about a cup's worth of magic energy, and Diablo possessed around a bathtub's worth, then Klem's was more like a raging river's.

—She's completely different from everyone else?!

The colossal tide of magic energy gushed forth, making it hard for Diablo to even breathe; he was going to drown in it at this rate.



“H-Hey! Don’t let it overflow that much!”

“Mn, ahhhhh!”

Klem clung to him as she shuddered. And then—

She opened her mouth wide, showing off rows of sharp, pointed teeth.

—*She’s going to eat me?!*

She lightly sank her teeth into Diablo’s neck—a love bite.

The sensation from that slight pain etched itself deep into his consciousness. Immediately afterward, the tension in Klem’s limbs went slack, just like a puppet who suddenly had its strings cut.

“Fwah...”

She collapsed in a heap on top of him. The torrent of magic energy had finally ceased flowing as well.

As for Diablo—it was as if none of this had just happened. His body felt incredibly light now. Klem and Shera were both draped over him, sound asleep, as if they had been knocked out cold...but it felt like they weighed nothing at all.

His MP had been fully replenished, with all his fatigue melted away. His senses were now heightened, and he could feel pure strength flowing into each of his limbs. It was almost like he had taken some sort of shady enhancement drug or other. This may well be a similar feeling to when a Fallen received power from the Demon Lord.

—*Maybe it’s because I’m a Demon?*

The blood of the Fallen that flowed within him may have reacted to the magic power of the Demon Lord.

†

It was past noon when he woke up. Sleeping in like a vampire, it had reminded him of his nights as a game addict.

“Wow...”

Shera and Klem had fallen asleep on top of him, both almost completely naked.

—*No matter how nice the climate is here, you guys are gonna catch a cold if you sleep like that...*

Not only that, they were wet as well.

—*I guess that would be sweat.*

“Man, oh man...”

“Wh-Why in the world are you all half-naked?!”

A loud voice suddenly shook the room. Standing in the doorway was Rem, her eyes as wide as could be.

“...Shera...and even Klem, too?!”

“This is, um... It was hot, you see, and...”

“If it was so hot that you had to remove your clothes, then why are they hanging all over you like that?! I don’t understand! I don’t understand any of this *one bit!*”

—*I don’t really have a clue, either...*

Rem briskly walked across the room toward the bed, grabbing hold of Shera’s cheeks.

“What is the meaning of this, Shera?!”

“Mmblgh... Gewd morningh, Rehm.”

“...Why...are both you and Klem...sleeping, on top of Diablo—*naked?!*”

Klem’s head slowly rose from the bed, a devilish smile on her lips.

“Mngh...?!” Rem shrank back.

“Heh heh heh... I have awakened. Now, bring me biscuits!”

“...The dining hall is on the first floor...”

“Hmph. There are too many rules in this town. You should be able to sleep and eat in the same place, I say...”

Grumbling all the while, Klem got down off Diablo, who let out a deep sigh.

—*Because of what they did to me, I had a hard time going to sleep for a while... I’m all good recovery-wise, but my head still feels kind of fuzzy. Mental fatigue, I guess you’d call it?*

“It is time for you to wake up! *Now!*”

Diablo lifted his arm, prompting Shera, who had been sleeping while wrapped around it, to fall off the bed and tumble onto the floor.

“Owie?!”

Looking to see what all the commotion was, Alicia came running to the room, an expression of alarm on her face.

With everyone officially awake, Diablo and the others headed downstairs to eat brunch.

“I’ll just have to burn this whole town to the ground, then!”

Klem made this disturbing proclamation in the middle of the dining hall at the Peace of Mind Inn - Twilight, sending Shera into a panic.

“Wh-What are you saying?!”

“You said that there were no biscuits here! *NO BISCUITS!!*”

“They don’t have biscuits at the restaurant inside the inn.... But, there’s a bakery called 《Petre’s》 that sells them, though! The ones filled with cream are the best there!”

“...The biscuits at Petre’s are quite delicious.” Rem nodded.

“Though their bacon bread reigns supreme in terms of flavor.”

“It was worth coming here from another world just to be able to eat their freshly baked bread,” Diablo agreed.

Alicia stood silently next to them, as if she was their own personal bodyguard. She was staring intently at Klem.

—It looks like she might still be wary of Klem because she’s a Demon Lord.

Folding her arms, Klem proclaimed smugly: “Then you shall guide me there!”

“What should we do?” Shera asked Diablo, an expression of concern on her face. “I’m fine with just going over there and buying stuff to bring back, but...”

It was true they should be hiding Krebskulm. The town was sent into a turmoil from just a single Fallen appearing; who knew what kind of chaos Faltra would be thrown into if people found out there was a Demon Lord amongst them.

But did that mean they should keep her locked up in their room all the time? Not only did that make Diablo feel bad for her, it was probably impossible, too. At some point, there was no doubt she would eventually say she wanted to go outside. But luckily enough for them, almost all of Klem’s most Demon Lord-esque features could be hidden by throwing a robe over her—because of the climate, though, there weren’t all that many people who wore clothes with hoods.

“...If someone should ask us about her race or her relation to us, what should we say?” Rem asked to confirm before they headed out.

“There’s nothing we can do if they see her tail, but for now, say her horns are just decoration. Those ears of hers stand out far too much, so we have no choice but to call her an Elf.”

Shera looked at Diablo, head tilted. “You sure? Aren’t they a little different compared to an Elf?”

“Don’t worry about the small details. I’m sure it’s not much stranger than a busty Elf.”

“Mmph.” Shera looked down at her chest.

—I wonder if it’s true that you can’t see your own feet when they’re that big... I can’t even begin to imagine what that would be like.

“Where exactly would this bakery be located?” Alicia moved the conversation along.

“The Southern District!”

“...Then let’s head to the Central Plaza first, shall we?”



As they traveled along the eastern road toward the Central Plaza, the imposing building that was the Adventurer’s Guild came into sight.

“Hey, isn’t that Emile?” Shera said as she pointed.

It seemed like the young man in question had noticed them as well. He was decked out in a set of gilded armor that stood out so blatantly it almost forcibly drew your eyes to toward it. He had thick eyebrows, and a single tuft of hair that fell down onto his face. He was tall for a Human, with facial features that showed his intrepid nature and the force of his will.

He was Emile Bichelberger, the number one Warrior of the Adventurer's Guild, and it looked like he was with some of his party members today. The other Adventurer in the white robe who had helped save Shera from a kidnapping was there as well.

"We're heading back first, Emile."

"Sounds good! I'll be out doing the usual."

"Try and come back before it gets cold, okay?"

With those words, his party members went inside the Adventurer's Guild, while Emile joined Diablo and the others.

"Greetings, my friend! How you holding up?"

"Nothing's really chang— Well, actually... Doing considerably well, all things considered."

Diablo looked at Rem and Shera, the two people who had brought him to this world. They had each grappled with their own problems, with Shera having been pursued by her home country, and Rem dealing with Krebskulm's soul sealed inside of her. He hadn't solved all their problems yet, but they were at least making progress.

Noticing his gaze, Rem smiled back at him, with a playful smile coming across Shera's face as well.

Emile spread his arms wide in grandiose fashion. "Oh, my lovely maidens! Have you been faring well? Have you gotten lonely since you haven't been able to see me?"

He wasn't a bad person, but his strange fixation on women was definitely a bit of a problem.

"...You're still the kind of person I would like to keep my distance from, I see," Rem sighed.

"I getcha, though I know he isn't *really* a bad guy. He did save me before, after all," Shera said with a bitter smile.

Alicia gave a polite bow: "My deepest apologies for not introducing myself the other day. I am Alicia Cristela, an Imperial Knight."

Alicia and Emile had met during Shera's attempted kidnapping, but they didn't have the time to talk back then. But now, Emile flashed a smile wide enough to show off his pearly white teeth.

"My name is Emile Bichelberger, an ally to all women! If you run into any trouble at all, please, do not hesitate to come to me!"

Alicia's response was flawless, but Emile seemed a little bummed that she had brushed off his trademark introduction so easily.

With a strained smile, Emile dropped his gaze for a second—where it caught on Klem, who still donned her robe.

“Um... Hey, my friend... And this would be...?”

“An Elf.”

Now that Diablo thought about it, they hadn’t decided on the story behind their relationship with Klem. Luckily, Emile was the type of person who didn’t care about small details like that.

“Hello there, my young Elf maiden. What would your name be? I am the great Emile, an ally to all women. If you ever run into trouble, you can count on me; I’ll come running to save you whenever and wherever!”

Krebskulm glared suspiciously at Emile. “What’s with this guy? He’s a little *too* friendly, don’t you think? And not only that, but he thinks he can save a Demon Lord? Well, I’d like to see you try! I will have you prove you possess the ability to back up those words!”

“Huh? Demon Lord?”

“That is correct! My name is—mmph!” Shera had come up behind Klem and covered her mouth with both hands.

“Klem! Her name is Klem! She’s my little sister!”

“What?! Then she’s an Elf princess, too?!”

“Ah... Um...”

It looked like Shera had blurted that out without thinking about her own pedigree. Besides the fact that she had run away from home, she was also the princess of the Kingdom of Greenwood. Plus, since her brother had died, she had gained the right of succession, and was next in line to take the throne. If she had a little sister, that would make her a princess, as well.

“...Stupid Shera...” Rem placed a hand on her forehead, exasperated. “Do you have a second, Emile? We do not like to stand out, and your appearance and loud voice is making us do just that. Do you understand what I’m trying to say here?”

“Even without my devilish good looks and melodious voice, I would think you stand out plenty already, wouldn’t you?”

There was no denying that—all together, their group consisted of a Demon with horns growing out of his head, a busty Elf, and a rare black-furred Pantherian; and the two girls just also happened to be wearing Enslavement Collars around their necks. To top it all off, they even had a female Imperial Knight with them. They were a veritable collection of walking anomalies, so of course people would stare at them as they walked about.

“...Even if that may be so, we do not have the luxury of time to stand around talking.”

“I see, I see. Now that you mention it, I don’t have that kind of time, either. It seems like some Paladin by the name of ‘Saddler’ has

come here from the Royal Capital, and it sounds like he has a less than stellar reputation for being a regular evildoer. I was planning on keeping watch around town to make sure no women ran into any unneeded trouble with him, but...do you know of him?"

Diablo nodded. "I turned him into a statue yesterday. Is he back to normal yet?"

"WHAT?! You already confronted him?!"

"I have no reason to fear an insect like him. It was true he was the type of person to cause harm to innocent people."

"Good grief... Still exceeding my wildest expectations, I see. If that's the case, then it seems like I won't need to worry about you. Leave taking care of the townspeople to me—the great Emile will protect them!"

"Very well."

"Well, not that I was ever worried that you would lose to some Paladin in the first place," Emile said with a shrug. "But try not to overdo things, got it? I don't want to see my dear friend's face plastered on a wanted poster."

If Diablo ended up killing a Paladin, he would most likely end up as a fugitive pursued by the country, and he wanted to avoid that any way he could.

"I will destroy anyone who dares defy me. That is all there is to it," Diablo snorted.

"You say that...but this is the Church we're talking about, you know."

"My humblest apologies," Alicia said, bowing her head. "The higher ups in the Royal Capital are also concerned about the Paladins and their rather radical approach to their work... If anything comes up, would you be so kind as to inform me as well?"

"Oh? Seems like you have some circumstances of your own to worry about, too."

"Yes... Ah, but since I am going so far as to make a request of an Adventurer, allow me to pay you for your trouble."

"No need! If I can be of service to a pretty lady, then that is enough for me. If I find anything interesting, I'll be reporting back to you!"

Giving a short farewell salute with his fingers, Emile headed inside the Adventurer's Guild.

Afterward, the group headed toward the Southern District, paying a visit to Petre's. It was a bakery run by three Grasswalkers, all of them males, and had a placard with a rabbit drawn on it hanging outside.

Klem bought all the biscuits she could handle, while everyone else

chose some freshly-baked bread. They ate at one of the tables inside the shop, and after they were finished, they strolled around town for a bit before finally making their way back to the inn.

It was yet another peaceful day.

†

The following day—

Diablo and the others were grabbing lunch at the Peace of Mind Inn - Twilight. Alicia said she had official Imperial Knight business to attend to, and had left earlier that morning.

“...I will be heading to the Mage’s Association this afternoon,” Rem said, rising from her seat. “I’ve been indebted to Celes this whole time, so I figured I should least let her know what has happened thus far.”

“You have a point.”

“...I’m worried about taking Klem with me, so I will be heading out by myself.”

“I shall allow it. Be back by this evening.”

“All right.”

“See ya!” Shera waved goodbye. “Tell Celes we say hi!”

Just as Diablo thought Klem would keep munching away on biscuits as if this didn’t concern her—

She offered Rem a biscuit.

“I don’t know where you’re going, but if you get hungry, you should eat this!”

“.....Sure.”

“That’s wrong; you should be saying ‘thank you!’”

“Ah... I suppose you’re right. Thank you very much.” A complicated expression on her face, Rem accepted the biscuit, a faint smile on her lips.

—It looks like she may have gotten a little more used to this.

With that, Rem left the inn.

After finishing lunch, Shera was teaching Klem a song in the dining hall, which was now devoid of customers.

—I don’t know much about what the songs are like in this world, but they seem to be more like nursery rhymes...and all about food, for some reason.

“Sylvie!”

Shera pointed towards the entrance of the dining hall. There was a girl who wore barely any clothes at all, only keeping her chest and her waist covered, while her red hair came right down to her shoulders, cut just so. She was a Grasswalker, and sported long rabbit ears growing from the top of her head, and a small, round tail behind her.

No matter how old she got, her childlike appearance would never change. Sylvie was the Guildmaster of the Adventurer's Guild in Faltra, so she had to be fairly older than she looked. But not only did she look like a kid, she acted with all the innocence of one as well.

"Heya, Diablo and friends! How you all doing!" She waved enthusiastically at them, then sat down in one of the empty chairs.

"Are you here to grab something to eat, too?" Shera asked her.

"Mm, maybe I will grab a little something... But the truth is, I came to see you all."

"...This isn't another troublesome request, is it?"

The first time Sylvie had come to them with a request, it turned out to be a trap. Just when he thought their next job would be a simple delivery errand, he had ended up fighting against an army of one hundred Fallen. And just the other day, Sylvie had come to him with a request to "prevent a war with the Elves."

"They weren't *all* bad, right?" Sylvie said with a bitter laugh.

"Like that herb gathering quest I gave you just a while ago."

"Hmph..."

On the quest, a Fallen had appeared, and they were attacked by bandits—in short, another troublesome quest.

"I'm not here with a job for you today. I heard that you got a new girl in your group," Sylvie said as she looked toward Klem, "and wanted to come see what she's like for myself."

"So you've already heard from Emile, I take it."

"Bingo! Klem, was it?"

Klem's cheeks were filled to the brim with biscuits at the moment. They had gotten her to eat a bit of omelet earlier, but given the chance, she would just start munching away on biscuits again.

"Fwat ho yoo whant?"

Shera wiped Klem's mouth with a handkerchief, a smile on her face. "No talking with your mouth full, Klem. All right, now swallow... Ah, geez, you're spilling all over the place! ...But you're so cute!"

Shera had a look of pure joy on her face. To her, it must have really felt like she had gotten a new little sister.

A smile crossed Sylvie's face as she looked at Klem. "...Seems like a regular kid to me."

—It looks like I still can't let my guard down around Sylvie.

Even though she was smiling, she was still prying for information.

"How much do you know?"

It wouldn't be a good idea to make Sylvie their enemy. He really wanted her as an ally, if at all possible.

"Nothing at all." She shrugged. "I was just a bit worried, which is why I came to check up on you. You seem like the kind of person who holds nothing back, after all... Even if it's against a child."

Her stare bored into him—he suddenly remembered what happened the other day.



He had drunk a bottle of alcohol Sylvie brought for him in place of an MP potion...but he had no recollection of what happened after that. Apparently, he had done...something to her back then.

—*Though I don't remember a thing about it...*

By the time Rem and Shera had gotten back, she had already left—with Diablo holding a bottle of alcohol and a piece of Sylvie's clothing in his clutches.

—*I really must have done something, huh...*

But having people think he got drunk and laid hands on a child (or at least, someone who *looked* like one) would be a problem for him, so he pretended he knew nothing about it.

"I have no interest in children, for I am a Demon Lord. Hmph."

"Well, we'll leave it at that for now..." Sylvie's voice was strangely cold.

In a warm and friendly tone, the complete opposite of what she had just used with Diablo, Sylvie called out to Klem:

"If you ever run into trouble, come to me, OK? Do you know how to get to the Adventurer's Guild?"

"Very well, so you wish to serve the Demon Lord, too! It seems there are people amongst the races who understand how this works, after all."

"Demon Lord?"

"I shall give this to you!"

Chest puffed with self-importance, she thrust out her hand—and offered Sylvie a biscuit.

As if suddenly coming to an understanding about something, Sylvie gave a wry smile.

"I guess you really *are* Diablo's kid after all... Thanks." Sylvie popped the treat into her mouth.

"Oh, is this from Petre's? It's pretty good!"

One week later—

The bell of the church rang thrice, signaling it was three o' clock in the afternoon. Diablo and the others were on their way to a café.

"...I'm sorry for making you come all this way for me." Rem reiterated herself as they passed through the gate of the Central District.

"It's fine! I've been really looking forward to going to a café!" Shera said cheerfully.

"...We did make a promise to go, after all."

"Are you fond of cafés, Miss Shera?" Alicia inquired.

"Ehehe~ I've only asked people about what they're like, so that's all I know about them. But someday, I want to open up my own café!

Rem will be the waitress who brings customers their coffee, and Diablo will be the guy who wipes the cups!"

—*Somehow, I've become the busboy. Great.*

Rem shrugged her shoulders. "...I haven't made any promises for the future. Even though I did promise I'd take you to a café, I had no idea it would end up being like this."

"Don't worry about it, I'm happy just as long as I get to go one!"

"I would think these to be necessary arrangements, considering the current situation." Alicia nodded. "It's nothing you need worry yourself over, Miss Rem."

"...I wonder about that."

Their destination was a café located somewhere in the Central District. Waiting for them there was the Head of the Mage's Association of Faltra: Celestine Baudelaire. After Rem had explained everything to Celes, Celes had told Rem she wanted to meet with Klem. Because of that, they had brought Klem along as well.

Shera was holding Klem by the hand. Diablo stood at the back of the group, watching the girls. He was bad at jumping into conversations with many people involved.

Rem was uneasy: "When I said it would be difficult to take her to the Mage's Association, she suggested a café instead."

"I would think that to be a reasonable suggestion." Alicia nodded. "If this person were to try and cause harm to Miss Klem, I would imagine it to be quite difficult to fight back while inside the Mage's Association."

"...Though Celes was aware of the Demon Lord's soul sealed inside of me, she allowed me the freedom to act of my own accord. I would like to think there is no need to worry about her doing anything contrary to that now."

"No one can understand what a person's true feelings are."

"...I'm more worried about something else this time... No, Diablo is with us, so I'm sure it will be all right."

"I should hope so."

The reason the girls kept their conversation vague was because Klem was with them. They were worried that she would suddenly awaken to her true Demon Lord nature and attack Celes, and it seemed they were counting on Diablo to prevent that situation from coming to pass. He was certainly prepared for anything to happen, but after observing Klem for the past few days, it seemed needless to worry about that now.

—*All she does is eat and sleep.*

She was just a child; a child who really liked biscuits, at that. Shera had basically become a kindergarten teacher, spending every day teaching Klem songs and making toys for her to play with. The

two had completely opened up to each other.

The thing they should *really* be worrying about was breaking the bank with the ridiculous amount of biscuits they were buying. As soon as Diablo's party ran out of money, that's what would truly bring about the advent of the Demon Lord—or at least, that's the way he thought of it.

The Central District was partitioned off from the rest of Faltra by towering stone walls. The group had passed through the gates here before on their way to the governor's mansion. Diablo had run into a bit of trouble with one of the guards last time he came through; but since they had Alicia with them this time around, they got a free pass just by being with her.

The roads here changed from cobblestones to tiles. Instead of being built from stone like everything else, the rows upon rows of mansions were built from bricks, clearly showing that wealthy citizens lived in this town as well. There were even guards posted all over the place, their job being to protect the public order.

After turning a number of corners, they spotted a small, stylish-looking store.

“Wow... So *this* is a café, right?!” Shera exclaimed in awe.

Just like the others, the base of this building was also built from brick, but the roof was made out of a wooden framework. An iron sign was hanging in the entrance, and the door was fitted with a pane of glass. It was the first time Diablo had seen a glass door since coming here.

“...I have heard this was built similarly to shops in the Royal Capital,” Rem said as she introduced the place. “Celes may have already arrived ahead of us, so let's head inside.”

She pulled open the door—the aroma of coffee wafted through the air. Diablo had drunk plenty of coffee since coming here, but this fragrance was completely different from the kinds he had tried.

Still holding Klem's hand, Shera entered the café, her head on a swivel as she looked around in excitement.

“Wow! Wow, wow, *wow!* This is amazing! Like, *really* amazing!!”

“Hm, I don't really get it myself...but there are supposed to be delicious biscuits in here, right?”

“There are! They're called scones. I remember a girl who had been to a café in the Royal Capital bragging about it.”

Alicia looked like she had something to want to add to the conversation, yet remained silent. Now that he thought about it, Alicia actually lived in the Royal Capital, and as the daughter of a duke at that. She must have been to a café at least once before. Diablo, too, had a rough understanding of what they were like thanks to his time

living in his previous world.

—But scones aren't biscuits, right?

It was an almost cramped space, with two four-seater tables inside the shop, and five seats available at the counter. The shop had just opened recently, and no matter where he looked on the inside, it was so new; everything was clean and almost sparkling. He had heard it was supposed to be some kind of hoity-toity, extravagant place, but even compared to the shops back in his original world, it was overflowing with the feel of a high-class establishment. This was different from the shops that would fill a plastic or paper cup full of overly sweet coffee for 300 yen.

—Damn, now I'm getting nervous. I've never been inside a normie haven like a fancy café back in my world.

There was only one customer in the entire shop. Already seated in a chair, she smiled at Diablo and the others. She had a gentle face, and wore a long robe that covered her voluptuous figure. A staff leaned against the wall near her, indicating her status as a Sorcerer.

It was the person whom they had come to meet with—Celestine Baudelaire.

“My, my, welcome! ...But me saying that when the employees are right over there is strange, isn't it.”

“...Did we keep you waiting?” Rem said as she greeted her.

“To be completely honest, I was so excited that I ended up arriving a good while ago. It was definitely the right choice to come here; no matter how long I wait, I never get tired of being here. I've actually wanted to try visiting a café myself, you know?” A childlike smile played on her lips as she spoke.

“M-Me too!” Shera said, leaning forward. “I was really, really, *really* looking forward to coming here!”

“My, so you're the same as me, then. It's marvelous being able to taste the same coffee that you would find in the Royal Capital, isn't it? —Oh, would that be her?” Though Celes was sure to know Klem's true identity, she still wore a gentle expression on her face.

“And who the heck are you supposed to be?”

“Very nice to meet you. My name is Celes, and I am the head of the Mage's Association in this town.”

“Oho, I see. So you're the one in charge of maintaining the barrier for this town.”

Klem looked around. It seemed she could see the streams of magic being used to keep the barrier in place.

Slightly nervous, Rem's face tensed up; but Celes gave a gentle smile. “That's right. It's a serious responsibility, which is why it was so

hard to come here by myself... But I'm glad that I did. I get to meet someone as adorable as you, after all."

"I have only come here to eat biscuits!"

"Is that so? They're very delicious, I assure you. Please, have a seat."

"Very well!"

Klem plopped herself down into a chair, while Shera automatically took the seat beside her, almost like she was Klem's guardian. Rem took the remaining empty seat.

Since it was only four seats to a table, Diablo and Alicia opted to sit at the adjacent table instead of pushing the two of them together.

All alone with Alicia... His nervousness was flying through the roof.

—*Who would've thought I would end up going to a fancy café and sitting right across from a beautiful woman like this.*

Trying to hide the loud thumping of his heart inside his chest, Diablo proclaimed boldly to Alicia: "Order whatever you like."

"Thank you very much, Sir Diablo... But are you sure it is all right?" She pointed to the menu lying on the table.

For reference's sake, a cup of coffee at the Peace of Mind Inn was 200 friths, while other places wouldn't go over 300 in price. At this fancy café—

It was 3000 friths for one cup.

—*WHAT THE HELL?! Three zeroes?!*

He could barely stop himself from yelling it out loud. It was a price that rivaled the cost of a night's stay at the Peace of Mind Inn, breakfast included.

—*And Celes chose HERE for our meetup spot?! Are you TRYING to make me bankrupt, is that it?! Curse you, she-devil! You evil witch...!!*

A pleasant smile came across the face of the wicked woman in question.

"I will pay for everything, so please, order whatever you like."

"Oh, so you're an angel after all..."

Fortunately, no one called Diablo out on what he had muttered to himself.

The coffee brought out to him was completely different than the kind he usually drank. It had a strong sour taste to it, but it complimented the bitterness of the beverage, making it easy to drink. Funnily enough, the first thing that came to his mind was that it was almost like drinking orange juice. There was certainly something other than sugar that gave it its sweetness.

—*Holy crap! This stuff would sell like crazy if it was for sale back in the city!*

Klem was no good with coffee because of how bitter it was, but

was considerably pleased at the cocoa and scone brought out for her: “It’s so sweet! And yummy! This muddy water stuff and biscuit are delicious!”

It seemed that any kind of treat was a biscuit to her.

“I’m glad it’s to your liking, Klem.”

“Yes, I shall praise you for this! The biscuits I usually have are fine—but this biscuit was very yummy, too!”

“Hehe... Feel free to have seconds as well.” It seemed Celes was having a great time enjoying this.

When it came time to take their leave, Diablo had Alicia, Shera, and Klem leave ahead of them. In the limited amount of time they had as they took care of the check, Diablo and Rem were conversing with Celes, keeping their voices low so the other employees wouldn’t hear them.

“Celes, you’ve heard everything from Rem, I assume? Even though she has lost her memories...Klem is still a Demon Lord. What are you planning to do about her?”

He didn’t want to make the Mage’s Association their enemy, but it was true Celes had a duty to protect the other races. How would she make her move?

“Hehe, I would think there is no Demon Lord that exists like her. She doesn’t kill people, and she loves to eat sweets... I don’t think you could call someone like that a Demon Lord, do you?” Celes’s playful smile never left her face.

“...I’m grateful to hear you say that, but will you be all right, Celes? Will you not get punished?” Rem asked, concerned.

“It’s the same as what I did for you, Rem. I don’t know what will happen if this goes public...but to me, I find taking away someone’s freedom unnecessarily to be quite unpleasant.”

Celes was the key to holding the barrier protecting Faltra in place. Though she made a conscious decision to play that role, it also robbed her of any kind of freedom—and that’s exactly why Diablo felt he could believe her words.

†

Leaving the Central District via its southern gate, they headed toward the town plaza. Alicia had said that taking this path would be like a shortcut—but the street was jam-packed with people perusing the various stalls lined up here. Unlike the Central District, where all the rich people lived, this scene felt much more like a town full of commoners.

“I’m sorry, I did not expect it to be this crowded...” Alicia said apologetically.

—*Not like it's her fault the marketplace is this crowded.*

Because of Diablo's appearance, people would usually give them a wide berth as they walked down the street, but that wasn't going to happen with this many people here. Everyone was so focused on shopping that even if they bumped into him, most wouldn't even pay any mind to him. If they didn't come face-to-face with him, then it didn't even matter he was a Demon Lord.

Klem was fed up with the crowds of people: "Enough! How about I just burn them all!"

"No! That's a no-no!" Shera scolded.

True, burning everyone alive was a bad thing...but as they weaved their way through the throngs of people, Diablo could at least understand the feeling of wanting to.

Alicia held out her hand to Klem. "Let us hold hands to make sure we aren't separated. We always leave this task to Miss Shera, so this time, *I shall accompany you.*"

"Hm? Fine, I suppose there's no way around it. Make sure you hold onto my hand tight so you don't get lost."

—*It's you who she's worried about getting lost, Klem...*

Diablo started walking toward the western road. He thought it would be a bit strange for a Demon Lord to worry about the people he was with getting lost.

While Rem seemed concerned about what was going on behind her, Shera came up next to Diablo, grabbing his arm with a, "Wait up!"

"Hmph. Everyone is heading to the inn, no? Then there shouldn't be any problems, even if we stray from each other."

"Well, yeah...but it's more fun when we're all walking together!"

"Then...do whatever you want."

"OK!"

As of late, Shera may have seemed like a big sister looking after her little sister, but by nature she was a girl who had always been a bit childlike.

She wrapped herself around Diablo's arm. It had been a while since Shera had pressed her supple chest against him, and Diablo was having a rough time not letting his unrest due to it show on his face.

Diablo and Shera were at the front, followed by Rem, with Alicia and Klem bringing up the rear.

—*It kinda feels like we're a party from an RPG... Though the person at front is a Demon Lord, not a hero.*

Demon Lord, Summoner, Summoner-Archer, Knight, Demon Lord—it's a pretty unbalanced party...

After they had walked a bit more and escaped the crowds, Shera suddenly yelled out—

“Everyone’s gone!!”

—Looks like they did get lost after all.

Rem, Alicia, Klem—they were no where to be found.

—In this situation, Shera and I are the smaller group, so would that make us the lost ones in this situation? But we were the ones at the front, so that doesn’t seem right...

Were we walking too fast? I’ve never been in front when walking around in a group—let alone ever being in a group—so I don’t have a clue...

Knowing Rem and Alicia, they would head back to the inn if they were separated from the group—

But even so, he was plagued with a vague sense of apprehension.

They hightailed it back to the Peace of Mind Inn. Rem and the others hadn’t returned yet, so Diablo and Shera decided to wait; but after waiting for about 20 minutes or so—

Diablo heard the chiming of the bell from a nearby church, signaling it was five o’ clock in the afternoon. Shera couldn’t take it any longer.

“I’ll try going back! They could be out in the Central Plaza looking for us! You stay here, Diablo, since we may end up just missing each other while I’m out looking.”

“Very well.” He couldn’t fully commit to his Demon Lord role play in a situation like this.

Klem may have been a Demon Lord, but she was also a child. He had thought it would be all right just having Rem and Alicia with her...

—But if they were actually together, wouldn’t they be back by now? It seems like there’s a good chance Klem really did end up getting lost...

Was Alicia out searching for her? What was Rem doing?

As thoughts tumbled around in his head, Shera took off toward the Central Plaza.

“I gotta hurry up and find them!”

The more time passed, the less people there would be out shopping, which would make it all the easier to find their lost companions.

But he couldn’t suppress a feeling of dread. It would be fine if this was just needless anxiety on his part, but he couldn’t calm down just waiting around for them.

“If Rem or Alicia comes back, tell them we’ll be waiting in our room,” Diablo instructed the receptionist. “Don’t let them go back

outside, got it?”

“Alrighty! Just leave it to Mei. ☆” She sounded the same as ever, but Diablo felt a slight aura of seriousness from her words.

He headed toward the plaza; however, all that had happened was the number of people searching went from only Shera to the two of them—and there wasn’t much point to that. He would need much more manpower if they were going to find them.

As he walked around, mulling over what to do, he spotted a large building along the western road—

“I’ve got it...”

—the Adventurer’s Guild.

Chapter 4: Rem's Story

It was well before the church bell rang out five times—after she had become separated from Diablo and Shera at the Central Plaza.

Rem was in one of the back alleys between the buildings.

“...What is the meaning of this?”

She had been chasing after two people, and even lost sight of them a few times...but she had finally caught up.

Unlike the lively Central Plaza, the alleyway was dim and grimy, with trash strewn about everywhere. People dumped the garbage from their homes here, where it was left as is. The smell wasn't too terrible because of the how arid the air was in Faltra, but this wasn't necessarily a place you would want to come to on purpose.

Standing ahead of Rem in this back alley—was Alicia, who had been pulling Klem along by the hand. Cheeks stuffed with biscuits, Klem didn't seem to have the foggiest idea as to why she was brought here.

“Mm? What's wrong with *you*?”

“...Um, well... I don't understand why she brought you here...

Alicia, why *did* you bring her here?”

A faint smile came across Alicia's lips. “I had been planning on only bringing Miss Klem here by herself, then calling Miss Shera afterward... But maybe it's better that you are here with us instead, Miss Rem. It could turn out to be a key of some sort.”

There was something different than usual about Alicia. Staying on guard, Rem reached into the pocket of her leather belt where she kept her crystals, so she would be ready to call a Summon at any time.

“...What are you talking about?”

“Exactly why is it that Miss Klem is missing her memories?

According to the Fallen priests, it is not just magic energy that is needed to resurrect the Demon Lord...but something else as well.”

“...Fallen priests?” Rem grew even more tense.

It was from these priests that Edelgard had borrowed their knowledge as her source for conducting the ritual.

“Why, yes... After what happened, I left town to go speak with Miss Edelgard—about how to regain the Demon Lord's lost memories, and how to perfectly awaken her.”

“What are you saying, Alicia?!”

“If the Demon Lord had not lost her memories, I would have been able to tell you the truth so much sooner...”

“...Alicia... Are you trying to say you’re hoping for the resurrection of a Demon Lord who would kill the races?”

“That is exactly what I have been saying, no?”

Rem’s voice was trembling. “...Alicia... You... That would make you a Demon Lord worshiper!”

“Yes, it does.” Alicia smiled pleasantly.

It was a bright, cheerful smile, something completely different than what she had shown in front of Diablo and the others. Perhaps it was a result of that feeling of relief one got from revealing how they truly felt.

Klem looked up at Alicia. “I don’t understand a word you’re saying. I’m already resurrected! This is my perfect, complete, and flawless form!”

“But you will not kill the races, yes?”

“Correct! Because I can’t remember why I would want to do so in the first place. Also, the races are the only ones who know how to make biscuits!”

“That is why I wish for you to awaken... For you to open your eyes...”

“Enough of this drivel! Do you want me to roast you alive?!”

“If it will awaken your true self, my lord, then I will gladly offer myself as the first sacrifice. In fact, I would feel no greater joy than if you did so.”

Klem looked appalled, and tried to put some distance between herself and Alicia—but she would not let go of Klem’s hand, keeping the same gentle smile on her face.

“That’s enough! I’m leaving!”

“To do so, you will have to kill either myself, or the person over *there* standing in our way. The moment you do, that is when you will truly awaken as the Demon Lord.”

Rem took out one of her Summon crystals—it seemed Alicia had used Edelgard in order to gain information from the Fallen priests; these weren’t baseless claims she was making.

—So that means as soon as Klem kills someone, she will awaken as the true Demon Lord? I have to stop that from happening...!

“Why are you trying to awaken the Demon Lord, Alicia?!”

“My one desire is to wipe out these unsightly races—to have a world that is ruled over by the resplendent Fallen.”

Nothing had changed about the way she looked—but to Rem, it was a sinister feeling, like she was facing a monster that had taken on

the form of Alicia.

There was nothing more for them to talk about.

“...I will be taking back Klem *now*.”

Alicia was an Imperial Knight, and was sure to possess abilities that made her worthy of that title.

—*Will I be able to win against her...?*

Rem gripped her crystal tight. She was already going to be a difficult opponent in a one-on-one fight—then, someone else came to Alicia’s side.

Another knight had appeared in the dark alleyway—one that Rem had seen before. The man leisurely strolled toward them, the sound of his feet scraping against the dirt with each step he took. He was outfitted in thick armor, and carried numerous swords on his person.

“Here you are, Miss Cristela. I was searching for you, you know?”

A smile on his face so sickeningly pleasant it seemed downright suspicious—it was the Paladin, Saddler.

There was a dark, burning fire in his eyes, many times more intense than the last time they had met. Back then, he had taken them lightly and looked upon them with scorn—but now, he was like a ravenous beast.

“My apologies, we were held up by this Adventurer...” Alicia cast a frigid look toward Rem. “No, by this Demon Lord worshiper.”

Rem’s eye widened. “What?! *You’re* the Demon Lord worshiper here, Alicia!”

“Perish the thought. As a result of my infiltration into your group, I was able to ascertain that you were all Demon Lord worshipers, and managed to put this child you abducted under *my* protection.”

“...So *that’s* the story you’re going with. You sold me out to this Paladin, didn’t you?”

“No—I have just saved this child.”

“...Ngh.”

—*Alicia’s goal is the destruction of the races, and to create a world ruled by the Fallen. That is the reason why she wanted Klem to awaken as the Demon Lord.*

According to the Fallen priests, the awakening would happen as soon as Klem killed one of the races. But then why would Alicia hand Rem over to a Paladin? What reason did she even have for getting involved with him in the first place?

She didn’t understand. Rem was an experienced Adventurer, and was no stranger to strategy and tactics—yet even then, she still wasn’t able to read into Alicia’s real intentions.

“...The only thing I have come to realize here...is that I will not let you have Klem!

“...Come, 《Asulau》 !!”

Rem threw down her crystal, calling forth her Summon. A bull with three horns on its head had appeared, its size far and away surpassing any bovine found in nature. Its specialty laid in its ability to stampede toward opponents, and could do the most damage in a single blow out of all the Summons in Rem’s possession.

Though Rem had suffered a defeat to Saddler back at the restaurant, she couldn’t afford to lose here.

—*I have to get Klem back!*

Going up against a Paladin, an Imperial Knight, and the four subordinates Saddler had brought along with him was going to be a difficult battle; but if she could raise as loud a commotion as possible, people were sure to come. It would make it all the more likely for Diablo to notice them—and that was exactly what she was counting on.

Asulau charged towards the Paladin, who ordered his men:

“Be my shield.”

At Saddler’s words, his subordinates came to stand directly in front of the Summon, all at once. One of them was pierced by Asulau’s horns, being seriously wounded—but the other three managed to push back, killing the momentum of the giant Summon’s charge.

“How can this be?! Why would you listen to an order that could get you killed?!” Rem struggled to understand.

“It is because the Gods will it that we are able to live here.”

Saddler grinned. “Dying is the same as being called by the Gods dwelling in the heavens. Those that follow their will while alive will be forgiven in death; while those who oppose them shall receive punishment and plunge into the pits of hell. Protecting me is the same as protecting the Gods themselves. Amongst my subordinates, there exist no such non-believers who would refuse my orders out of mere fear.”

Saddler casually drew his sword—and plunged it into Asulau’s neck. Leaving the blade where it was, Saddler drew a second, then a third sword from around his waist, skewering them into the Summon.

“Ha! Fuhaha! Quite the tenacious Summon, this one!”

Asulau thrashed about, but Saddler’s subordinates desperately held it down with all their collective might. The gravely injured Summon had finally faded away, regressing back into a blackened crystal.

Even if it couldn’t fight back, it happened all too fast. Rem had been shocked by Saddler using his subordinates as a shield—but after seeing him defeat a Summon of that stature, that quickly, she came to realize Saddler’s strength was not normal.

—*Could his skill as a Warrior be almost the same as Galford?*

If his level was that high, Rem couldn't even begin to guess how strong he was. Compared to the other Adventurers here, who spent their time patrolling the town or gathering herbs, Saddler's strength was on a completely different level.

—Add on to the fact that Paladins could use magic as well.

"Ngh... Come, Stoneman!" She called forth yet another Summon.

Under normal circumstances, Rem should have run away. Even if it was just her and Saddler one-on-one, the chance of Rem winning with the Summons she had on hand was slim. There were four of Saddler's subordinates as well—though only three of them were fit for combat now. Alicia was also at hand.

Klem, on the other hand, still didn't seem to understand what was going on, and was staring at the events unfolding before her with a sullen look on her face. To her, this might all just seem like some kind of unamusing sideshow.

Stoneman swung its colossal fists, sending Saddler's subordinates flying.

"Do you happen to need some assistance, Sir Saddler?" Alicia raised an eyebrow.

"Oh, no. That will not be necessary."

"If this keeps up, people will start to gather before long. Would that not be inconvenient for you?"

"Hehe... Now this is a surprise. I was under the impression you thought it better if I didn't do my job."

"I agree with the idea that we cannot overlook any Demon Lord worshippers."

"I see, I see. My most humble apologies for having doubted you the other day. It seems that you were the kind of wonderful person who understands the will of the Gods after all. The Gods watch over your deeds, Miss Alicia."

"Why, thank you very much."

"No matter the case, there is no need to worry. I will be putting an end to this shortly... She is a comrade of the man who insulted me—I will show her no mercy..."

"Hurry up and capture her!" Saddler issued the order to his subordinates. "But don't harm her, and make sure you do it as gently as possible. That way, it'll make the pain waiting for her all the more...sumptuous."

"Yes, sir!" They were quick to respond, but it seemed Saddler's subordinates were having some difficulties dealing a fatal blow to Stoneman's adamantine body.

As that happened, Rem went to call another Summon. Using powerful Summons one after the other, and at the same time at that, would heavily drain the caster's magic reserves.

—*But right now, I have to fight!*

“What’s wrong?” Klem asked. “Do you want to kill these guys? Well, you should just leave it all to me! These friends of Mr. Clanky Armor here don’t have anything to do with biscuits, so I’ll turn them to ash in an inst—”

“Stop!” Rem yelled.

Klem froze where she stood. After being tangled up in them for so long, Rem had finally managed to straighten out her feelings, and turned her thoughts into words:

“...Klem... Please, don’t kill anyone. Keep eating biscuits, singing songs with Shera, and smiling with everyone... That is my wish for you.”

“Are you being serious...? There’s no way you can win against these guys, you know?”

“...I don’t want you to kill anyone. If nothing else, I want you to remember that.”

“I don’t really get it, but all right,” Klem sighed. “I promise.”

Rem smiled softly. “...I was terrified of you...and perhaps, even hated you... But spending these past few days together, like we were a family... I did not hate that. Right now, I know that I do not want to lose you—even if it costs me my life!”

She threw out a new crystal—summoning 《Shadow Snake》, she sent it speeding toward Saddler. It was a pitch-black snake that would coil around an opponent to stop them from moving.

Equipping her metal claws to her hand, Rem charged after her Summon for a follow-up attack.

“Haaaaaa!!”

“Heh...” Saddler’s lips twisted into a smile. “Just what I would expect from an Adventurer from Faltra, the city deemed the front lines of the races. You’re so full of fighting spirit; so brave, so talented—truly wonderful.”

He drew another sword from his waist and swung it, slicing through Shadow Snake.

Rem thrust her fist forward to drive her claws into Saddler—but right before that happened, the Paladin fixed his glare on her.

—*Oh no, Subtle Chant?!*

“Hngh!!”

“Bow down before the Gods, corrupt worshiper of the Demon Lord!”

She lost control of her body, collapsing to the ground.

“Guh...!!”

Rem had her hands on the ground—but couldn’t move them. No longer able to fight back, it was as if she was prostrating herself for Saddler.

She had been “Paralyzed” yet again.

“You truly are wonderful,” he whispered by her ear. “After all, there can be no despair if there is no hope. The fact that you held onto the utterly foolish hope that you could win against me was truly marvelous... And now, you will fall into despair.”

Saddler placed a hand on Rem’s head. Magic that could only be used when in direct contact with someone was extremely powerful, and amongst those spells existed one that could rob a target of their consciousness.

—A sudden impact, as if Rem had just taken a blow to the back of the head. She felt darkness starting to eat away at the edges of her vision. Consciousness fading fast, Rem reached out with her hand. Klem’s eyes were open wide.

Alicia whispered beside Rem’s ear:

“What she needs...is hatred.”

As Rem finally fell unconscious, Stoneman lost the source of its magic supply, returning once again to its crystal form.

†

Rem’s consciousness slowly returned to her. It felt like her body was being shaken.

She opened her eyes; everything was dim, but there was someone peeking over to look at her. It was a small shadow of a person, wearing a robe.

“Hey, you OK?”

“Klem!” Rem instinctively reached out to her, looking Klem up and down to confirm she was unharmed. It seemed she wasn’t hurt anywhere.

“...You’re all right... Thank goodness.”

“Of course I’m all right; why wouldn’t I be? You’re the weird one here, falling asleep like that all of a sudden.”

“...It seems I was done in by Saddler’s magic.”

“Aha, so that weird flashy-light from before was magic. Quite frankly, it’s kinda pathetic you lost to a guy with that little magic power in him.”

“...I suppose you’re right.”

Rem was fairly well-known around Faltra as an Adventurer, but her battles had mostly been a string of failures as of late.

—*Diablo, Fallen, Paladins...*

A sigh escaped her lips. She ran her gaze over her surroundings; it was dark, but she could just barely make things out: They were locked inside a cage, iron bars surrounding them on all sides. It was small

enough that she couldn't stand up; even Klem would probably hit her head on it. There was a thick cloth draped over the cage, which explained why everything was so dim.

Her hands and legs weren't bound by anything, most likely because there was no need since her capturers had already taken away any weapons she had on her.

—*What is this shaking...?*

It was most likely because they were being transported on the back of a wagon, she imagined.

“...How long have I been unconscious?”

“Enough time for me to finish off a bag of biscuits.”

Even now, Klem was still busy crunching away on biscuits. It seemed she had been won over using the same method Diablo and the others used to get her away from Edelgard.

Judging by how fast Klem ate biscuits, it hadn't been more than ten minutes or so. By Rem's estimation, even if she had been shoved on the wagon in the shortest amount of time possible, they shouldn't have left the town quite yet. There was also a slight amount of sunlight leaking through the fabric that covered the cage. Since the rays were coming in from the left, that probably meant the wagon was heading north.

—*To the Central District?*

...*No, we're still too far out—most likely the North District.*

It was a spacious area, and compared to the Southern District, which was filled with Demis, it was a much more affluent and wealthy location. Rem hadn't been here too often, so she didn't remember what types of buildings were in this part of town.

—*Would people notice if I shouted? Maybe something like, “Help, they're kidnapping me!”*

Although, we're dealing with a Paladin and an Imperial Knight, so that would probably be useless... In terms of public trust, they hold an overwhelming advantage.

Now that I think about it, it's strange, isn't it?

Rem calmly thought things over. As she pored over her previous conversation with Alicia, she was more inclined to think Alicia hadn't actually been telling the truth.

If Klem kills one of the races, she would awaken as the Demon Lord... If that was true, then Alicia should have attacked her after Rem had been knocked unconscious. Though she looked like a child, she still had all the powers of a Demon Lord: She could bestow her magic energy upon other Fallen; she watched battle after battle while looking as calm as could be; and she even referred to Saddler as having miniscule amounts of magic energy—she seemed so terrifyingly powerful.

If Alicia made a full effort to attack Klem, then she most likely would have become the first of the races killed by the Demon Lord, just as she'd wished. Did she suddenly start caring more for her own life? If that was the case, then she could have used one of Saddler's subordinates instead.

Though she couldn't say for certain due to her lack of information, wouldn't Alicia claiming that Klem's true self would awaken from killing one of the races be a lie? If so, then would what she said about wanting to awaken the Demon Lord and being a Demon Lord worshiper also be a lie?

Maybe that was all just too convenient for Rem to hope for. The truth of the matter was Alicia had handed both Rem and Klem over to Saddler, a Paladin.

"...If only... If only I was stronger..."

"You should eat this." Klem stuck out her hand, offering a biscuit to Rem.

"Huh? Um... Thank you very much."

Rem stared at the biscuit in her hand; it was about time for dinner, and it was true she was hungry—

"...It seems you've suffered a great deal because of me, huh, Rem..."

"What?" Rem was surprised not only by Klem saying her name aloud, but by what was said as well.

"Alicia told me all about it...that you had been suffering because of me." Klem's shoulders slumped. "Not just you, but your mom...and her mom... Always and always... But just now, you fought to protect me... That's what she told me."

"...I did. But I lost in that regard, however."

"You fought to protect me... Even though it wouldn't be strange for you to detest me so much."

".....I will not deny I faced my share of hardships because of you."

"Even now, you've been locked up in a thing like this because of me. I don't really know much about the races, but I do greatly value the loyalty you've shown toward me, Rem."

"...I would not call this loyalty."

"Hm?"

Rem hugged her knees, eyes cast downward. With some hesitation, she spoke about how she felt:

"...The Gods sealed the soul of the Demon Lord Krebskulm into one of my ancestors generations ago. Because of that, the women in my family have lived their lives avoiding as much contact as possible with people in their day-to-day lives. They took great care of their bodies in order to not release the Demon Lord, always making sure to leave behind a daughter... They all sacrificed so much throughout

their lives, giving up on many things, never settling down, and always keeping their distance from others. They lived their lives in isolation and fear. So why... Why only me...? Why was I made to be the vessel for Krebskulm's soul?"

Klem looked at her curiously: "So because of me, you had no freedom?"

"That's how it was, yes."

"I see... Not having freedom is a bad thing. Downright irritating, in fact." It had gotten through to her easier than Rem had expected.

"...Now that I think about it, the entire time we were all suffering, you were sealed inside us as well."

"I was basically asleep half the time, though. But yeah, I understand that feeling of resentment from having your freedom taken away."

"...Do you detest us as well?"

"The only ones I hate are the Gods."

"I see..."

Rem was shocked to learn that the bedtime stories she had been told all these years were actually true; and to hear it from the Demon Lord herself was definitely unexpected...

"Mm... Then it's only natural you would despise me... Of course you would hate me..." Klem said glumly.

Rem sighed.

—I don't want you looking that sad...

If Klem had been a tyrannical overlord of evil, then Rem wouldn't need to fuss over any of this. Diablo would have already defeated her by now, and she would have succeeded in overcoming the hatred of the Demon Lord that had been passed through her family for generations.

—But the Krebskulm they had resurrected was nothing more than an innocent child.

Rem looked down. "...It's true that I had always thought of you that way. However, you just *happened* to be born as a Demon Lord, right?"

"Hm... Ah? True, I was born as a Demon Lord."

"...You didn't choose to throw our lives into disorder... I've come to realize you're the same as me. We're just normal people, made to carry very abnormal destinies."

"I'm not really a 'person,' technically, but I get what you're trying to say."

"...That's why I want to protect you. I don't think Alicia's been telling the whole truth. Will you actually awaken when you kill someone? Or is something else needed as a key to complete the process? At this point, all we know is that she's scheming about how

to truly awaken the Demon Lord.”

“So it seems... Geez, and even after I told them I was already in my most perfect, complete, and flawless form,” she said as she nibbled away at her biscuits.

Rem refrained from saying that Klem was none of the things and instead spoke gently, almost as if she were saying it for herself.

“...Let’s get back with everyone else... I know we’ll make it back to them.”

“If I could use my powers, I could bust us out of this stupid metal box and turn that clanky armor guy and his friends to ashes!”

Rem hugged Klem close to herself; it was the first time she had touched Klem of her own volition.

“...You can’t do that. You promised, remember?”

After a brief pause, Klem nodded: “Yeah, I did.”



Before long, the wagon stopped; it seemed they had arrived at their destination.

With a great deal of noise, the cloth was unceremoniously removed from the cage. The setting sun was just about to be hidden behind Faltra’s towering walls.

The cage opened and Saddler beckoned to them.

“Come out, if you please. We have arrived at the place of your salvation.”

“.....”

Saddler’s subordinates reached in and grabbed Rem by the arm, dragging her out.

Surrounded by graves, they found themselves in a cemetery with no signs of other people to be found.

It wasn’t dark yet, but Rem could no longer hear the hustle and bustle of the city, despite the walls of the city being extremely close by.

This was the northernmost edge of Faltra. She remembered hearing about a cemetery used exclusively by the upper echelons and elite of Faltra, while the cemetery for common townsfolk was located outside of the city’s walls. Though it was protected all around by a wooden gate, it would sometimes become damaged due to water or wild animals.

Nothing had changed with Klem. Thanks to the biscuits Alicia had given her, she was completely under Alicia’s control.

Rem had made Klem make a promise to her earlier... But still, she worried about Klem.

—She wouldn’t start killing people in exchange for biscuits...would she?

The sound of a bell tolled from the building in front of her. Ringing exactly six times, it announced that it was six o' clock in the evening.

A church—it was extremely old, but kept under good maintenance. There were marks and scars left over from the repairs done to the stone walls, and brand new stained glass were set into the windows. A circle with poles stretching out of it, two at the top and the third holding it in place, adorned the roof of the belfry; it was the holy symbol of the Church. The looming wooden doors were opened, and Rem and Klem were pushed inside.

Just as its appearance suggested, it was an old, well-maintained church.

A strange smell reached Rem's nose. It was an odd smell that stuck to the nose, and was almost sweet... Almost like the smell of rusted iron. The stench was coming from the strange instruments that laid deep inside the church.

A single chair had been placed inside, with an assortment of tools gathered around it. Rem didn't know what they were used for...but she did remember the rumors surrounding Saddler.

He would torture any who he suspected to be a Demon Lord worshiper, forcing a confession out of them—and swiftly executing them.

Rem's eyes widened.

—Are these all torture instruments?!

Rem glared at Saddler. "...I am no Demon Lord worshiper. No matter how much you may harm me, I will not make false confessions."

"Oh, thank goodness."

"...What?"

"Whenever people who have heard the rumors of me see my tools, they always break down crying, claiming that they've had a 'change of heart' and to let them 'prove their faith to the Gods.' I ask you: Who would believe such shallow words? You, on the other hand, are a Demon Lord worshiper, without a doubt; one who tries to deceive us men of the cloth."

"Ngh... You're planning on torturing me no matter what, I see."

"Oh, heavens no. People get the wrong idea about it all the time. What I do is not torture."

"...Then what would you call these instruments? They certainly do not look like normal kitchenware."

"Any normal person would mistake this for 'torture,' but what I

am doing is ‘salvation.’ Anyone who worships the Demon Lord is in the wrong, and through my actions I save their defiled souls. I wish to save all the races.” His voice was brimming with confidence.

She couldn’t understand what he was saying: a metal object with spikes densely packed along it; a saw with wicked, jagged teeth—they were all stained with a dark red grime, and showed signs of being well-used. Though he called it salvation, it was exactly as the rumors said: He tortured his victims, then executed them.

“...Are you trying to say your method of killing people is ‘salvation?’”

Saddler shook his head. “I am not killing people. They are *forgiven* by the Gods through my salvation, and are summoned to the heavens; that is all.”

“What are you...?!”

“Seeing those once rotten souls purified through my salvation and gaining the Gods’ forgiveness—I can’t help but shed a few tears of joy from seeing that.”

“...That’s... That’s just them dying as a result of your torture!”

“Oh, no, no, no. Since I have forgiven them, it is the same as the Gods forgiving them. In that case, then those souls being beckoned to heaven through death is a joyous blessing.”

—*If he forgives them, the Gods forgive them?*

His reasoning was nonsensical.

“...Are you trying to call yourself a god?!”

Speaking like that had to be strictly forbidden by the Church. But with the same virtuous smile on his face, Saddler’s expression never changed.

“Now, this is something I don’t like to throw around too much, and I try to keep it a secret as best I can—but, apparently, I *am* a God.”

“...What was that?”

“As I said, I am a God who has made his descent upon this world. Understand?”

“...I’m speechless.”

“I was born into an abundant household, blessed with this well-endowed body, and boasted a superior intellect—after receiving all the favors from the heavens, one could only think my existence to be as a God who has descended upon this world to offer it salvation.”

His words were overflowing with confidence; he completely believed everything he had just said. Rem was dumbfounded.

“...No matter what I say, it seems words are useless with you.”

Saddler pointed at Rem’s ears. “That is not true; any conversation with me is anything but pointless. The more we can exchange words like this, the better I am able to understand the gravity of your sins.”

“...Ridiculous. I am *not a Demon Lord worshiper*.”

“Those ears of yours... They’re no good.”

“What?!” Rem backed away, covering her pointed ears with her hands. A chill crawled up her back.

“That tail is no good, either.”

“...This is just how Pantherians look...! Though the black coloring isn’t as common, there is nothing strange about it.”

“Oh, no, I fully understand. You can’t fool the ears of God. Now then, let’s begin cutting them off.”

“Wha—?! You said you would not torture me!”

“Of course. This isn’t torture, but a removal of the pieces that are causing your soul to be so impure. The parts of you that have not gone bad are very important; this body was given to you by the Gods, after all. That’s why I will carve away at you—bit, by, bit.”

“...Y-You... You can’t...!”

Realizing what Saddler’s intentions were, Rem began trembling at the knees.

—He’s calling other people impure while fully intending to tear me to shreds!

Saddler looked her up and down with a stare filled an unpleasantness as if he was licking her all over.

“Hm, so this hand is what sicced those Summons at me... This is no good, either.”

“...You are going straight to hell.”

“And such a foul mouth... Maybe I’ll tear out those teeth as well.”

At Saddler’s signal, three of his subordinates approached Rem.

“That’s right; because of your horrid Summons, one of my loyal followers was gravely injured. But I have already bestowed a healing miracle on him and let him rest. My, my, you really have done an outrageous thing.”

“Because you used them as a shield...!”

The knights grabbed her by the arms. With no weapons or Summons, she had no way to fight back against them or Saddler. She hated everything about this.

Rem turned to look at Alicia. “...I don’t understand. Why would you betray us to help someone like him?”

Alicia shrugged. “I have my own goals. If you’re not fond of pain, why don’t you try calling for help?”

She placed a hand on Klem’s shoulder as she spoke. Sensing Rem’s fear, Klem had a grim expression on her face—she had even stopped eating her biscuits.

“Do you actually need my help after all?”

“...I-I don’t! Please, keep your promise.”

“Y-Yeah.”

—*I already instructed her not to get involved, but what can I do about a situation like this...?*

“Do you not understand what is about to happen to you, Miss Rem?” Alicia gave a wry smile.

“...Of course I understand. What I *don't* understand are your goals. Are they to resurrect the Demon Lord and destroy the races? Then why is what you're doing now so necessary?”

Saddler looked towards Alicia; the smile on her face had not disappeared.

“Oh my, you say I want to resurrect the Demon Lord? Goodness, Demon Lord worshipers do say the strangest things.”

“...Alicia... Everything you have helped me to understand... When you went with us to save Shera... Has it all been one big lie?”

“My, my... Again with your strange ramblings.” Alicia turned her back on Rem. “Sir Saddler, I am a bit squeamish with things involving pain. May I leave the rest to you?”

“Yes, please leave it all to me. I will also personally vouch for your innocence, Miss Cristela.”

“Thank you very much. Then I shall return after having something to eat.”

“Understood. By that time, I am certain this Demon Lord worshiper will have attained forgiveness from the Gods.” It was as if he had just made a proclamation as to how much longer Rem had to live.

“Oh, that's right... This child,” Alicia said, laying a hand on Klem's shoulder, “is only a victim who had been captured by these Demon Lord worshipers, so could you please make sure no harm comes to her? If she runs out of biscuits, please provide her some more.”

“Of course, of course. After all, she's just a poor, innocent child we managed to save.”

Rem was forced to sit in a chair with armrests by two of Saddler's subordinates, who were holding both her arms down.

Klem was watching Rem from one of the corners of the room. The expression on her face basically read: “Are you really not gonna ask for help?”

What would happen if Rem were to put herself first by asking for help from Klem, and possibly awakening her as a true Demon Lord? She didn't want that, no matter what.

She, her mother, and her mother's mother had suffered greatly in order to keep the Demon Lord Krebskulm from being resurrected. Not only that, but if the group were to lose the Klem that was here right now, it would surely make Shera sad; she even said Klem was like a little sister to her.

Saddler took out an enormous pair of scissors.

“Heheh, feel free to scream as much as you would like. No one really stays around a graveyard after the sun sets.”

“...You’re completely vile... Do you not have a conscience?!”

“Certainly, I do. If I don’t bring salvation to Demon Lord worshipers, it makes my chest ache horribly. Now then, speaking of salvation, let’s begin with yours... Starting by lopping off those vulgar ears.”

The blades came closer to her ears.

“Mmgh...”

“With this, you’ll be one piece removed from being normal... One step closer to being Human.”

“...Saying that Humans are normal is just you discriminating against Demis!”

“What’s wrong with calling something filthy as such?”

Rem tried to twist her body to escape, but one of Saddler’s subordinates grabbed her by the collar and yanked her back into place.

“Don’t move!” One of them yelled at her.

Saddler brought the blades of the scissors to a close—

Shlnnk!

For an instant, Rem managed to wrest her body out of the way. The root of her ears felt hot—had he cut her?!

But it wasn’t that painful. It seems he wasn’t able to cut the whole ear off due to her struggling to get away.

Saddler raised his voice: “He told you not to move; do you not understand?!”

Practically screaming, he drew his sword. With Rem still being restrained, he brought the sword down directly above her right arm. The blade pierced through with a sickening noise.

Saddler’s sword went completely through her arm, reaching all the way to the chair’s arm rest.

“_____?!”

Pain assaulted the inside of her head, making her unable to even scream in response. Blood spilled on the chair.

Klem rushed over to her. “Rem?! Rem! Are you hurt?! Of course that would hurt! Why are you letting him do this to you?! I’ll kill them! I’ll kill them all right now! You don’t mind that, right?!”

“Urgh... You can’t...”

“You’re going to die if this keeps up, you know?!”

Death was terrifying; but even so, Rem couldn’t let Klem awaken as the Demon Lord.

“Do *not* get in the way!”

Saddler drew another sword from his waist and thrust it toward Klem. The point of the blade tore through Klem's robe; it fell to the floor in tatters, with her horns and lizard-like tail exposed for all to see.

—Saddler knows that Klem isn't normal!

Forgetting about the pain in her right arm, Rem yelled: "Run! Get away from here!"

But Klem made no attempt to run away.

For a second, Saddler and the other knights were frozen, staring fixedly at Klem. And then, a voice practically seething with hatred:

"She's a Fallen!"

Klem's eyes were filled with a burning rage. "*You fool! I am a Demon Lord, one that will turn you all to ash!*"

"Those horns—it makes me remember that other Demon... I see, then there can be no doubt about it—he is a Fallen as well. Tonight, I will have the governor send out his troops and we will HUNT HIM DOWN!"

—That Demon... He must be referring to Diablo.

Eyes not focused on anything in particular, Saddler stepped toward Klem, sword in hand.

"Those damnable horns... They have disgraced me... Those horns are too impure!"

"What did you say, Paladumb?"

"If Miss Cristela were to see those horns and tail, I'm sure she would agree with me... Damn Fallen, disguising yourself as an innocent Human child! You loathsome being!"

Saddler raised his sword overhead. Klem glared back at him.

"You dare think to oppose me? Very well! Repent for hurting Rem with your death!"

"Don't speak to me like that, Fallen brat; you befoul my ears! I will smash those horns of yours to pieces!"

Saddler slashed at her with his sword. At that moment, Rem kicked the chair; while Saddler's subordinates were distracted by Saddler and Klem, she wrestled herself out of their grips, pushing herself forward.

A violent pain ran through her right arm. The sword had pierced straight through to the armrest, as if she had been pinned there with a stake. The pain spread to her very bone.

But Rem's thoughts were not on her own suffering. She frantically kicked against the chair; it mattered not if even her flesh was split, and her bone severed.

"Klem!!"

Rem threw her body forward. Saddler had swung his sword, bringing it down upon Klem's head—

But Rem intervened. She became a shield for Klem, hugging the tiny Demon Lord close to her chest.

A burning pain ran through her right shoulder, as if someone had pressed a white-hot poker against her. She had been stabbed once more, the cold metal blade entering her body.

Copious amounts of blood spilled from her body, splashing over Klem as well.

“...Hrnf...”

Unable to form even a single word, only air escaped Rem’s lips. Klem screamed.

“Reeeeem?! ”

Collapsing to the floor, a puddle of blood spread out around Rem. Klem knelt next to her, calling out her name again and again.

“Rem! Rem! Rem!”

“...Run...away...”

“You too, Rem! I’m taking you, too! I’ll kill these guys, then I’ll keep you alive...!”

“...Pro...mise...”

“Y-Yeah, I promised, but...!”

“You got in my way, didn’t you?! You damn Demi!”

Dealing the final blow, Saddler’s sword pierced through Rem’s back, reaching all the way through to the ground.

“_____!!”

An abundance of Rem’s blood scattered through the air—pure, red, blood.

Klem was trembling, eyes wide open in horror. Anyone would die from losing this much blood, Klem knew that much. Rem would most assuredly die after this much blood loss.

Blood... Blood... Blood...

Her life was fading away.

Krebskulm let out a bloodcurdling scream.

Still collapsed on the floor, Rem heard a voice that shook the entirety of the church; something was happening. She knew that her own life was coming to an end. But even then, she could sense something even more grave than that.

Rem recalled the words Alicia had whispered to her in the alleyway:

“What she needs...is hatred.”

—But what was it needed for? For Krebskulm’s awakening?

Until now, Rem did not understand how hatred was created.

It was only now she realized—

Hatred was born when someone important to you was taken away.

†

Saddler was looking up toward the ceiling.

She should have only been a small child. A child with strange horns, and a tail like a lizard... Most likely some kind of Demi.

He had deemed her to be a Fallen; and just like always, he had gone to execute her.

She should have been a powerless child, destined to be executed by his hand—but now she had changed form, transforming into a gigantic...something. Was she truly a Fallen after all?

The Pantherian lying in a pool of her own blood managed to whisper a single word:

“...Krebskulm.”

—The name of the Demon Lord.

Saddler once again turned his glare toward the gigantic monster before him. What did that child call herself before? A ‘Demon Lord’?

“It can’t be... Her, a Demon Lord...? Impossible... That simply cannot be...”

Krebskulm swung her hand sideways, a shock wave rippling out from it. Saddler’s subordinates clutched their heads with small yelps of terror. The walls and roof of the church were blown away, fragments of the building burning in the air and turning to ash before they even hit the ground. It was unclear whether it was a magic or not.

The belfry; the holy symbol; the stone walls; the roof; the stained glass—it had all been blown away, with not even rubble being left behind. All that managed to remain were the floor and a wall, just about the same height as a person.

A pair of wings spread out behind Krebskulm, reaching toward the sky. These dazzling wings of light seemed like they would pierce the very heavens themselves.

Then, as if it were being drawn onto the sky itself, a magic circle expanded in the air. Unfamiliar symbols and lines spread across the sky, colliding with the barrier that enveloped Faltra, sending sparks flying.

A grating noise assaulted their ears.

Is this really the Demon Lord Krebskulm? Saddler thought.

He stabbed three of his swords into the ground, then gave an order to his subordinates:

“I’m going to use one of my ultimate spells! Be my shield!”

“Y-Yes, sir!” The three knights stepped in front of Saddler.

“Heheh... Even if you are an actual Demon Lord, my ultimate spell

shall make you vanish without a trace; not even dust will remain of you.”

Saddler was brimming with confidence. Even when faced with a Demon Lord, he would not lose his composure. The key to unshakable faith was an equally unshakable confidence, an absolute conviction that would lead to your victory.

Saddler thought of himself as a God—a living, breathing, veritable God. That’s why he believed his battle with a Demon Lord would only create yet another passage in his own personal legend.

Krebskulm sent her glare toward Saddler and the others. The flames of rage burned bright in her purple eyes.

“ROOOOOOARGHHHHH!!”

A baleful scream that shook the air itself; but even so, Saddler wore a composed smile on his face.

“Heheh... So you have noticed the power of my magic, you accursed Demon Lord... It is much too late, however.”

His magic energy was given form, and the spell was complete—his *ultimate* spell.

“Scatter to pieces—Flare Burst!!”

An explosion of roaring flames enveloped Krebskulm’s body. And just like that—

—it had no effect. From what he could see, it had caused no damage whatsoever to the Demon Lord.

Saddler was frozen in place, hand still outstretched toward Krebskulm.

“Huh...?”

Krebskulm swung her massive fist, driving it toward him.

It’s still all right. Saddler held firm in his convictions.

He was a God, and even if he faced danger that led to a brush with death, he would still come out alive. As for why—well, it was *because* he was a God.

The subordinates acting as Saddler’s shield had the upper halves of their bodies vaporized, and a burning wind scorched Saddler’s face. But even so, he was still confident in his victory.

Just you watch, he thought, it’s only a matter of time. The power of a God will defeat the Demon Lord. I will not die here, and that is because I am a God myself.

See, almost there, his thoughts continued. *The Demon Lord’s fist is coming closer. Now is the time for me to awaken my powers as a God! Ahhhhh, hurry, hurry, hurry! Now is the time, my Godly powers!*

“...Eh? Am I not a God after all...?”

Krebskulm's colossal fist smashed into Saddler's head. The bulky protective magic applied to his armor offered some resistance, and his sturdy body tried to keep itself together—

—but it was no use. Saddler's body was only Human, and was bound by the limits that encompassed being one. It didn't have the power to withstand the Demon Lord's strike, and was smashed to bits. The protective magic collapsed, and blood sprayed from his body, evaporating in the air from the intense heat.

He was scattered to pieces. And just like the subordinates he commandeered as his shield, only the lower half of Saddler's body remained.

Still collapsed on the floor, the small Pantherian girl looked up as her body slowly grew colder. Seeing her like this, Krebskulm let out another bellow of pure hatred.

—But she could no longer remember the reason for such contempt. All that remained was the intent to kill.

The awakening was complete.

The wails of the newly awakened Demon Lord Krebskulm resounded throughout the graveyard.

Interlude 2

City of Faltra, west gate—

Soldiers lined the ramparts of the city walls. The governor, Galford, was present as well. Eyes narrowed, he was looking toward the western horizon.

Despite the setting sun, the plains that were normally dyed a crimson red from it were instead blanketed in dark shadows.

“...Those are all Fallen?” Galford muttered. Though he was a hero who had fought his way through the Human-Fallen War thirty years ago, there was unrest in his voice.

Standing atop the city walls, he could see the Bridge of Ulug and the river running underneath close to the horizon. He had received reports that a near infinite number of Fallen were advancing toward Faltra from just beyond the fortress located there. Against such overwhelming numbers, the guards stationed at the fortress wouldn’t even be able to buy the city any time, which is why Galford had already given the order for them to retreat.

The reports he had received said there were two, possibly three, hundred Fallen marching toward them; but he’d doubted the accuracy of the information coming from panicking soldiers. The quantity of Fallen wasn’t the problem, though—it was their mettle.

Against stronger Fallen, only unique weapons would be able to deal any kind of damage to them. Even if the soldiers were to strike at the Fallen with normal weapons, they would only be able to scratch the surface; nothing would make it through to the core.

Just how many elite Fallen were there... Galford’s strategy would have to change based on his opponent’s strength.

The soldiers’ faces were pale; there were no cowards among the troops who would dare moan or complain in front of their commander. On the inside, however, they likely wanted to run away more than anything else. If they were to encounter any other unexpected situations on top of all this, Galford’s forces were liable to fall apart before they even began fighting.

Galford called out to his soldiers:

“Men, we are here to *die*. No matter how formidable the enemy, we will hold firm. Until we can evacuate Faltra’s citizens and combine forces with the armies from the capital, we must fight against time,

even if one of you becomes the last soldier standing. Take pride in knowing that our sacrifices will not be in vain; in the grand scheme, we are the foundation upon which the victory of the races shall be built.”

The soldiers’ expressions started changing. They wore the faces of men who had stifled their fears, ready to die protecting the city. Yet even Galford knew not how long he could preserve the morale of his troops.

A thunderous noise tore through the air.

“Was that a Fallen spell?!” one of the soldiers shouted as a commotion began to stir among them.

But that was wrong, for it had come from within the town itself.

Turning around, Galford spotted an explosion in the North District, originating somewhere around the cemetery. Roaring flames rose in the air.

No matter how experienced a commander he was, Galford never would have imagined the Demon Lord resurrecting and mowing down an entire church; not in his wildest dreams.

“Are those...wings of light?”

A gigantic magic circle spread across the sky, the likes of which he had never seen before—

No, Galford *had* seen the very same thing thirty years ago.

—*A Fallen magic circle?!*

The soldiers were in a state of turmoil, unaware of what was going on. On the other hand, knowing what this actually was, Galford’s own unrest was even greater still.

But he did not let it show; he stayed silent, grimacing as he looked toward the Northern district.

Another loud explosion rocked the town. It was a great distance from the West gate to the graveyard in the North District; far enough that an aristocrat would use a carriage to get there. That was why Galford hadn’t seen the Demon Lord Krebskulm erase a Paladin and his subordinates from existence. Whatever the case, he couldn’t afford to leave this matter alone.

He thought of the commanding officers he’d put in charge of the North and East gates: They weren’t the sort of people who could make decisions by themselves in a situation like this.

—*I should be heading out there.*

He would leave the West gate to one of the commanding officers, then leave one—no, two thousand troops there. He himself would take five thousand soldiers up the main road, toward the Northern district.

A tiny figure ascended the staircase of the rampart walls: a

Grasswalker. Redheaded, her rabbit-ears bounced to and fro as she ran toward Galford. Her chest and waist were covered in a thin, revealing cloth.

It was the Guildmaster of the Adventurer's Guild: Sylvie.

"Hey, Galford! So this is where you were."

"We are at war." Galford placed a hand on his sword.

"Adventurers have no business here."

"W-Wait! Hold on a second! Just hear me out." She frantically waved both hands. "There's nothing bad in it for you, I promise!"

"I must send troops to the North District as quickly as possible. I have no time to listen to you."

"Hmm?" Galford removed his hand from his sword, indicating with a quick jerk of his chin for Sylvie to continue.

Sylvie pointed toward the wings of light. "I kinda want you to leave the cemetery in the North District to us. We currently have our own way of dealing with that."

"...The encroaching Fallen army is still outside the barrier. I deem whatever has appeared in the North District to be more of a threat at the moment."

"Yup, that's right."

"Not to mention this magic circle—"

"Is probably what we saw thirty years ago as well, yeah."

"Even though you know as such, you're saying I should leave this matter to you?"

Sylvie gave a forceful nod. "Diablo has already headed over there, so it should be all right. That's why I want you to leave it to us, OK?"

"...I see."

—*That Demon has gotten involved yet again.*

"I will acknowledge his strength, but I will not say I trust him."

"He's not a bad person, you know?"

"He destroyed part of the main road and buildings on a whim fighting a Fallen, put slave collars around girls and parades them around town, refused the Kingdom of Greenwood's demands to return their princess, and fought against the very governor of this town; and here *you* are telling me he is not a bad person?"

"Haha... Wasn't part of that your fault, too, Galford?"

"As I thought, he cannot be trusted."

"That so? Then I guess that's that... But don't say I didn't warn you." Though Sylvie had said so with a smile, there was a cold gleam in her eyes.

Galford had experienced Diablo's power as a Sorcerer first-hand. He had even seen Diablo do battle with the massive Summon Force Hydra, the Elves' secret weapon. Diablo's power was enough to rival a thousand elite soldiers stationed in Faltra, with his strength perhaps

surpassing even that.

“There are a hundred thousand people living in this town. The barrier created by the eight towers along these walls protects them; but if the barrier were to be destroyed from the inside, the Fallen to the west would advance on Faltra. The chance that the troops stationed here will not be able to hold out is high. Do you understand what this means?” Galford asked Sylvie.

“Yes—if Diablo fails, the entire town will be annihilated.”

“Further behind us lay numerous towns that possess no barriers whatsoever.”

“I understand. But it’s all right; I don’t want to see masses of people dying either. That’s why I want to keep the number of denizens around Diablo as low as possible since he’ll be able to fight more easily that way.”

“...I will send a thousand troops there.”

“Oh, you will?”

“I am sure you will need assistance dealing with any vigilantes or curious onlookers. The army should be protecting the people, not Adventurers.”

A smile spreading across her face, Sylvie nodded. “Just what I’d expect from you, Galford! Let’s do our best to help each other out.”

“Then I leave the North District to you. No matter the occurrence, guard the barrier towers and the Mage’s Association with your life. Do you understand?”

“We’ll protect Celes. I’m leaving this to some kids who really know what they’re doing, so don’t worry about it, OK?”

Waving goodbye like a child who had just come over to play, she descended the stairs of the ramparts.

Chapter 5: The Two Demon Lords

Thirty minutes before the Demon Lord awakened—the bell of the church struck six times, the sound piercing the air.

Diablo had entered the Adventurer's Guild at dinnertime, so the dining hall on the first floor was jam-packed with people. Amongst the throngs of customers, he spotted Sylvie and Emile sitting at a table together.

The Adventurers of Faltra knew of Diablo's strength, which is why they would collectively shut their mouths when they saw him. Without realizing it, Diablo was wearing a grim expression on his face.

Sylvie noticed him come in: "Hey there, Diablo. What's up?"

"It's rare to see you come alone, my friend. Did something happen?"

"Something... Yeah..." he faltered.

—*How would a Demon Lord go about asking help from other people?*

He wanted these two to join in the search for Klem. But all the Demon Lords Diablo knew of would give orders; there was never a time they had ever asked for help finding someone. It would certainly be a piece of cake to give an order, as he would just say: "Klem has gone missing, along with Rem and Alicia. Find them." But could he ask for help with an attitude like that? No matter how much he sucked at talking with other people, he at least knew there was something wrong about that approach.

He couldn't use his Demon Lord role play in this case. As such, he would have to rely on his real self.

He broke out in a cold sweat.

Emile cocked his head to the side. "What's wrong, my friend? You're not looking too hot."

"...Ah... Well..."

He tried to explain what was going on, but flashbacks of all his failures interacting with others flooded his mind—

I was misunderstood.

I hurt others.

I was made fun of...

Even if they had been nice as they talked to me, I was just an object of ridicule afterward.

Remembering all this, his throat had closed up, rendering him

unable to speak.

“I wonder what it could be?” Sylvie had a curious look on her face.

At that moment, a Grasswalker boy—who looked like a child, but his age indiscernible—came running over. He wore his tattered clothes almost like a cloak of sorts.

“Excuse me!”

“Heya, something happen?”

Sylvie turned her head, stretching an ear out to them. The Grasswalker in old rags whispered something to her in a hushed tone.

Now that Diablo thought about it, Sylvie had her own responsibilities as the leader of Faltra’s Adventurer’s Guild; while Emile was in charge of managing all the Warrior-class Adventurers.

—It might be silly to bother them with something like searching for a lost child...

He had said his own share of absurd things using his Demon Lord role play, but when he reverted to his normal self, he would come up with countless reasons to not speak with other people.

As Diablo was gripped with a sense of unease, he only thought of Klem’s disappearance as a simple search for a missing child. He had no idea of Rem’s dire situation, or Alicia’s betrayal, which is why he couldn’t even begin to speak. The only thing he could do was stand there.

After hearing what the Grasswalker in tattered rags had to say, Sylvie’s eyes shot open.

“Diablo! Rem and Klem were taken away by a Paladin!” she shouted frantically.

“What was that?!”

Several Adventurers had fallen out of their chairs when he shouted in anger.

“Listen up, everyone!” Sylvie stood up from her chair. “This is an urgent quest! We’re going out to save Rem and Klem! Now Diablo, where’s Shera?”

“She should be in the Central Plaza, looking for Klem.”

“Then we’ll head there later. It sounds like that Paladin’s wagon was heading toward the North District! We gotta hurry!”

“Do you know where?!”

“We don’t know for certain, but most likely the church near the city walls in the North District. The Paladin has made that his headquarters for the past five days!”

“Then that’s plenty to work with! You have my thanks!”

“...Huh?”

Diablo rushed out of the Adventurer’s Guild. He hadn’t been to it yet in this world, but there was also a church in the North District in

Cross Reverie. It would only take about a minute to make it from one end of Faltra to the other in-game...

But in this world, the diameter of the town was more than three kilometers, so it'd take roughly 30 minutes on foot. The roads leading there weren't a straight shot, either, so it would take even more time.

—This level 150 body of mine isn't only for show! I'm just gonna have to sprint all the way there!

It was just starting to get dark, and the marketplace was closing up shop for the day. This meant the number of shoppers had dwindled as well, so Diablo didn't have to worry about crashing into anyone as he ran full tilt toward the North District.

Sylvie stood in the Adventurer's Guild, eyes round as could be.

"...He *did* say 'you have my thanks,' right?"

"That he did." Emile nodded.

Sylvie smiled happily. "Diablo seems like he's gotten much better than when I first met him."

"That man has always been a good person. He's an ally to women, after all! All the more reason behind why I wish to help him."

"I guess you're not wrong there. If the wagon's almost ready, then I'll leave him to you, Emile."

"He's going up against that Paladin, no? Will he even need the help?"

News regarding the incident that occurred at Pointy Ears had spread. Diablo was now famous around town for the fact that not even a Paladin was any match for him.

"It's fine if he doesn't." Sylvie shrugged. "But I'm getting a bad feeling about this. You have a skillful healer in your party, right, Emile?"

She turned her attention to an Adventurer wearing a white robe sitting at a nearby table. They looked down, embarrassed. While they were clearly shy, their abilities were the real deal.

Emile held his sword aloft.

"I don't completely understand, but if you say so, Sylvie, then I will heed your words! Let's go, everyone!"

Answering his call to arms, a great number of Adventurers, the one in the white robe included, stood up from their seats. Sylvie began giving instructions to the people around her as well.

A large cargo wagon pulled up in front of the Adventurer's Guild, and a crowd of Adventurers clambered into the back.

"Are you not going, Sylvie?" Emile asked.

"It seems like things are gonna get pretty noisy, so I think I'll go check in with the governor."

"Understood... Being surrounded by soldiers after we beat up the

Paladin doesn't sound like much fun, after all."

"Nope, it sure doesn't. Also, I didn't have the chance to tell Diablo...but it seems like there was someone else with Saddler when he took Rem and Klem away."

"Oho? Someone like him actually has allies?"

"Well, it looks like it was Alicia..." she said with a sigh.

Emile wore a complicated expression on his face. "She's...hmm... She's an Imperial Knight, so maybe it has something to do with her position?"

"Yeah, it definitely seems like she has her own circumstances she's dealing with, so I'm counting on you."

"Leave it to me! And I'll be counting on *you* to deal with the governor, Sylvie!"

The wagon sped off.

Just minutes afterward—

A shock wave spread across the town as wings of light pierced the sky. A magic circle expanded in the air while the howl of the Demon Lord resounded throughout Faltra.

†

Diablo was out of breath, having sprinted the entire way to a cemetery. He saw graves knocked over, scattered along the ground; but this wasn't because the graveyard had been abandoned—

All this was because of the monster there.

Its horns were warped and twisted, and it possessed five red points of light on its face. It almost looked like someone wearing a suit of armor, but upon closer inspection, it became apparent this was a veritable giant that one needed to look up at to even see its face. It was even floating slightly off the ground. The surface of its body was covered in a hard exoskeleton, like that of an insect. Wings of light spread out from its back, stretching toward the sky.

It was the Demon Lord, Krebskulm.

Behind it were the ruins of something that looked like it had once been a church. Even the rubble had been incinerated, with the only thing left being a wall that came up to one's waist. It seemed the Demon Lord left only that one single part of the wall standing, demolishing everything else around it.

Out of the corner of his eye, Diablo spotted a round object flapping its way through the air.

"Hm...?"

It was a round bird, about the size of a basketball—Turkey Shot! The Summon made a loop of the area then disappeared. Shortly afterward, someone came running from the far side of the cemetery; it

was none other than Shera.

“Diablooo!!”

“So, it was you... But why are you here?”

“I mean, that’s supposed to be Klem, right?! That’s why I rushed over here!”

“So I see.”

The Central Plaza was closer to the North District than the Adventurer’s Guild, which is why they had both made it here at almost the same time.

“That’s right! Diablo! Rem’s inside the church...and...”

“What is it?!”

“Blood...! There’s lots of blood!”

Shera’s face was deathly pale, while a shiver crawled down Diablo’s spine.

How many hours have passed since Rem had been taken away by Saddler? Diablo couldn’t even begin to imagine what had happened. But no matter the case, Rem was inside that church, and Klem had transformed into her true Demon Lord form.

Diablo reached into his pouch and pulled out every single HP potion he had, all nine in total.

“Take these! I’ll draw Krebskulm’s attention while you go save Rem!”

For a second, Shera was frozen in fear; but, even so, she grabbed hold of the potion flasks.

“Okay...! I’ll go save Rem!”

“Good. Make sure you circle around to get there.”

“Yeah! Oh, and Diablo—”

“What?”

“Don’t hurt her, okay...? Please save Klem...!”

Looking at the disastrous spectacle before him, he could no longer think of the being in front of him as that of Klem, but the Demon Lord Krebskulm. Could he even manage to talk to her?

—*No! No matter how bleak the situation, a Demon Lord is never pessimistic!*

Diablo brushed back his cape—

“Who do you think you’re talking to, Shera. I am the Demon Lord Diablo! Leave everything to me!”

Tears welling in the corners of her eyes, Shera nodded and started to run.

Diablo walked in front of Krebskulm.

—*I’m not here to defeat her, but to save her...*

As he stared up at the colossal Demon Lord, he wondered if he

had the leeway to even do that.

†

Diablo confronted Krebskulm head on, glaring directly into her face:

“Klem, do you know who I am?!”

“ROOOOOOOOAGH!!” Krebskulm bellowed in lieu of a response, swinging her fist at him.

Diablo had no way of knowing, but this very attack had extinguished the lives of a Paladin and his three subordinates previously, so there was immense power behind it. Of course there would be: This was a giant many times the size of any of the races, who was trying to smash her fist into Diablo with the same form a pitcher would use to throw a baseball.

—But it’s not that hard to dodge.

As long he wasn’t slowed down by her piercing howls or her mighty attacks, it became a simple matter of avoiding her on account of her gargantuan size.

—Do I just keep trying to talk to her without attacking her myself...?

He mulled things over.

“...If I was gonna be a good guy, I guess that’s what I’d have to do, huh.”

“ROOOOOOOOARGHH!!”

He dodged the second assault which gouged a hole in the ground, smashing gravestones to pieces. But he couldn’t bear to just keep running and dodging the entire time.

“Klem! Unfortunately, I will not be such a kind person to you, for I, too, am a Demon Lord! If you’ve forgotten my face, or even how to speak, then I shall make you yield by force! I will *make* you remember, even if you wish not to!”

He stabbed Tenma’s Staff into the ground, sending his magic energy through it. Once finished, he was immediately on the move again.

Krebskulm’s fist came to mow him down from the side, but he lowered his posture to dodge it. Her movements were like a child throwing a tantrum, but there was no mistaking the extraordinary force behind her attacks. No matter how much of a damage-reducing effect his Ebony Abyss had, it would be impossible to withstand a direct hit from her.

This wasn’t the kind of power fit for a one-on-one fight. Under normal circumstances, it would probably be best to put some distance between them and launch a series of powerful spells at her.

But the walls of the city were close, and the barrier towers not that far off, either. If Krebskulm were to destroy a tower in her

rampage, then Faltra would be defenseless against the Fallen and other monsters being held at bay. At the very worst, it was fine for the wall to be destroyed, but the towers absolutely had to be protected at all costs.

Diablo stabbed his staff back into the ground, sending magic through it once again.

—Eleven more places to go.

He was preparing to use a large-scale spell, one that required a bit of preparation first. This wasn't his normal Chant-type magic, but something similar to the Magic Circle vein of spells. Not only did it take time to set up, there was no point to it if the opponent didn't stay within the area where the spell was placed, which is why you couldn't really use it for one-on-one fights...

But Krebskulm was fighting like a child. If he could see through her patterns, there just might be a chance for him to activate the spell.

—It would be so much easier for me if she just kept swinging her fists around like this the entire time.

But Krebskulm suddenly stopped moving. It looked like things wouldn't be that easy after all.

The giant took in an enormous breath of air. Diablo's intuition spoke to him, so he responded by unleashing a spell of his own:

“《Volcanic Wall》!!”

A level 80 Fire and Earth elemental spell, the ground erupted with a wall of flames gushing from the newly formed fissure, almost seeming like they could reach the sky itself.

Now finished inhaling, Krebskulm spewed forth a jet-black 《Breath》 attack with a thunderous rumble.

—Looks like 《Darkness Breath》!

Breath attacks in Cross Reverie were classified as pure elemental attacks. Since they weren't spells, they couldn't be reflected using the Demon Lord's Ring. And since it wasn't a physical attack either, the damage-reducing effect from his Ebony Abyss wouldn't activate.

Diablo had chosen and refined his equipment to be able to deal against as many situations as possible, but it wasn't enough to stand up to every variety of attack thrown his way. Still, his Volcanic Wall managed to block Krebskulm's breath attack.

“Hmph... It would seem technique covers the difference in our abilities.”

“Heheheheheh...”

With a sinister laugh, Krebskulm spread her arms wide.

Diablo knew he was fighting against Klem right now, and while it was true he wanted to save her, his gamer instinct told him that being mocked by an opponent in this fashion was definitely not a pleasant feeling. He had been fighting a defensive battle this entire time, so he

couldn't do much about it now...

—*Just you watch, I'll beat you yet...!*

Diablo stabbed his staff into the ground and paused; crackling arcs of purple lightning ran across Krebskulm's hands.

“A Lightning-elemental attack...?!”

Diablo kicked off the ground as he retreated. Countless lightning bolts came down from the sky, pursuing him. What should have only been a single bolt turned into many, falling down one after the other as if they were attacking the entire area itself.

—*Is this the spell 《Lightning Meteor》?! I'm not wrong, am I?*

Diablo's lips curled upward.

“I thought I had shown you this during the fight with Eulerex...but it appears you truly have lost Klem's memories after all.”

The effect of the Demon Lord's Ring activated. The countless bolts of lightning were reflected away from him, instead raining down upon Krebskulm. For a second, he worried whether or not the attack would kill her.

Plumes of white smoke rose from Krebskulm—but it seemed like she had not taken any damage from it.

Diablo clicked his tongue. “That magic defense of yours is way too high!”

If this was an enemy the Cross Reverie devs had put in the game, it would be bad enough that they would be sure to receive complaints from players who played as Sorcerers.

“Then how about this! 《Stardust》!”

Diablo fired off a Water-elemental spell. It was only around level 30, so it was fairly weak, and it had a gaudy effect when used: Sparkling snowflakes scattered and danced through the air.

This wasn't a spell strong enough to damage Krebskulm, of course—but it had an interesting use to it. For a Sorcerer like Diablo, the cast time for this magic was extremely short, which meant it could be used in rapid succession. He sent off another five shots of the spell, one after the other. Blinding her, Krebskulm was surrounded with the dazzling effects of Stardust. Even against an opponent where magic couldn't damage them, there was still plenty of ways he could use his spells.

While Krebskulm was distracted by the flurry of low level spells, Diablo put a decent amount of space between them, piercing his staff into the ground and pouring even more magic energy into it.

“ROOOOOOOOARGH!!”

Krebskulm let out another piercing howl, but he hadn't seen her inhale for Darkness Breath. Her fists still couldn't reach him, and he could reflect any spell she threw at him.

At this distance, there was no way he could make a mistake—

A large object hurtled through the air toward him.

—*A coffin?!*

Using the same brute force that was enough to tear apart the ground just by punching it, Krebskulm had taken a casket buried in the ground and chucked it at Diablo. Since it made it harder to discern his opponent's movements, the disrupting effect of Stardust had backfired on him.

He couldn't dodge out of the way.

†

Shera stepped foot inside of what had once been a building. Judging from the walls, floor, and pews that still remained, she surmised it to have been a church. She hadn't taken notice earlier when scouting out the area with her Summon, but there was a vast quantity of red liquid spilled onto the floor. Bucketloads didn't even begin to do justice in describing how much there actually was.

“Eek?!”

Realizing it was blood, a small scream escaped Shera's lips. If there was this much, there was no way Rem could be alive.

The muscles along her back froze up.

—But this blood didn't belong to Rem. There were bodies on the ground: four of them. Men wearing armor...

No matter where she looked, she could only find the lower halves of their bodies. Shera had no way of knowing what happened to them from the waist up. She couldn't even imagine the fact that Klem's fist had vaporized them the moment it made contact with their bodies.

—*But more than that, I have to find Rem...!*

She walked over to where several ominous instruments laid strewn about the ground.

“Reeeem!!” Shera shouted as she rushed over to her.

Rem was lying in the exact spot Shera had found her using Turkey Shot. Her black hair was soaked in blood, and she suffered multiple wounds from being stabbed and slashed by swords.

—*This is awful... These weren't caused by Krebskulm, but Saddler most likely.*

“Rem! Rem!!”

There was no response.

Shera crouched down beside Rem. It felt like she would burst into tears at any moment.

But there was no time for that. Without even checking for signs of life, Shera took out the potions she had received from Diablo.

“Rem! You can’t die!”

She pulled out the cork from the potion flask, sprinkling the liquid held inside over Rem. As Shera prayed silently, she poured on the next potion. She didn’t think whether or not this was too much, or if this was pointless because Rem was already gone; she just continued covering Rem in the contents of all nine potion flasks.

“Rem, you have to live! Don’t die on us! You just became free, after trying so hard, and for so long! Oh, please, Gods above, I beg of you! Don’t take Rem away just yet! She’s worked so hard for everyone’s sake by protecting the seal on her, and now she’s finally free! She’s going to work in a café with me! So please, don’t take her away! She’s done so much and worked so hard, so I think you should be able to cut her some slack!”

Softly, slowly, a warm beam of light drifted down from the heavens.

**Cough*...*

“...Don’t...just decide...**cough**...we’re doing that...together...”

“Oh, thank the Gods!!” Shera jumped on Rem.

“That hurts, stupid Shera!”

“But...! But...!”

“Ah, but...it really does hurt. Until now, I couldn’t feel a thing...”

“That’s awesome! The potions Diablo made are really amazing!”

“...I see, so that’s what happened. That’s just what I would expect from Diablo.”

“How did this happen?” Shera asked. “You were almost dead, and Klem’s rampaging around...”

“...Alicia...betrayed us.” Rem had an anguished look on her face.

“No way?! Why would she do that? Are you sure that’s not some kind of mistake?”

“...That’s what I want to believe... But from the very beginning, it seemed her desire has always been to resurrect a Demon Lord that would kill the races.”

“What?! Why? I-It’s... It’s just like she’s...”

“Yes. Alicia is a Demon Lord worshiper.”

“How could that be...”

After hearing the whole story from Rem, Shera grew sorrowful, tears dripping from her face.

“That’s awful... That’s just so awful...”

“...I couldn’t agree more. Thanks to her, she made Klem go through this painful experience. It seems losing someone she cared about was the key to having her awaken as the Demon Lord.”

“That’s so cruel...”

“...Please, don’t cry like that.”

“But I just feel so bad for Klem...and for you...!”

“It’s true I almost died, but it happens all the time when you’re an Adventurer.”

“I don’t think you can say the same for things that hurt your heart, though.”

“...Yes... But now that you’re here, it does not hurt anymore.”

Rem lifted herself up off the floor with Shera supporting her.

“A-Are you okay?”

“...Of course... Uh?”

A large quantity of potions littered the floor. Rem’s eyes narrowed.

“Did you use all of these?”

“Yup.”

“...Diablo gave them to you, right?”

“That’s right.”

A tremor shook the ground—Diablo and Krebskulm were fighting close by.

“Were these all the HP potions he had? Is he fighting against an awakened Krebskulm with no items whatsoever?!” Rem grit her teeth.

“Ah...?!”

Another tremor rocked the remains of the building they stood in.

Then, the sound of footsteps drew closer to them, accompanied by the metallic clanking of armor. Thinking they could be allies of the Paladin, Shera’s body tensed up.

Rem lowered her voice. “...Run. You can make it by yourself.”

“No! I will never...NEVER...let you almost die again.”

Shera wiped the tears from her eyes and readied her bow, nocking an arrow into it.

A man in unmistakable golden armor poked his head through the crumbling wall.

“Well, looks like we hit the jackpot. Fear not, beautiful maidens, for I am here! You need no longer worry!”

“Emile?!” Shera and Rem both shouted out in surprise.

The other Adventurers he had gathered began to appear from behind him.

—A coffin, of all things!

His back slammed into a tombstone, shattering the stone to pieces and knocking the wind out of him for an instant. If it wasn't for the damage reduction from his Ebony Abyss, this would have been the end.

Standing back up again, Diablo immediately started running. Coffins rained down upon where he had collapsed just a moment before.

“Not bad... Pretty clever, considering it's you, Klem...”

He came to a realization: Throwing things around was merely another “attack” kids would normally use. In the end, Krebskulm was nothing but a child.

She possessed incredibly powerful magic, her Darkness Breath, and maybe even more unique attacks—but she had chosen instead to pick objects up and throw them at Diablo. As long as he could anticipate it, he could get a read on where she was aiming from the way she threw the coffins. They were large, but they weren't impossible to avoid.

—Even so, I took a lot of damage from that last one.

Diablo groped around the inside of his pouch, but his grasping fingers found nothing.

“That's right, what was I thinking...!”

He had given every single HP potion he owned to Shera.

—It's fine if it was enough to save Rem, but...

He had always been a solo player, so he wasn't used to dealing with situations where he had run out of items using them on other people.

Fresh blood dripped down by his feet; his head was bleeding. This might've been the first time he'd been injured this badly since arriving in this world.

“ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!!”

Krebskulm let out another bellowing howl, rapidly making her way toward the city wall.

—Just what is she trying to do?

Krebskulm strode over to the ramparts that surrounded Faltra, slamming her fist into them.

—Is she going to destroy the barrier towers!?

If she were to aim for the towers now, there was no way he could protect them. But that wasn't the case.

Krebskulm gouged out a portion of the wall, lifting it over her head—

“ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAGHHH!!”

“Wait, you can't be...!”

Panicking, Diablo started to run as Krebskulm threw the concrete at him.

“Goddamn it!”

Thinking about it from Krebskulm’s point of view, he had managed to dodge her fists, guard against her breath attack, and reflect her magic. The only thing that had any clear effect was when she threw something at him; there was no mistake she now based her battle strategy around this tactic.

A part of the wall that once surrounded Faltra came hurtling toward him, almost crushing Diablo.

“Hoooooly crap that was a close one...! When the hell did Cross Reverie become D*nkey K*ng!?”

—*Were the devs even planning on having the last boss do attacks like this!?*

The sound of metal clanking against metal drew closer to Diablo from the interior of the cemetery. He could see someone wearing a suit of golden armor.

“Hello, my friend!”

“Get away! You’ll get caught up in my magic!”

“Yeah, I’m leaving that all to you! I only came here to tell you one thing—Rem is all right! Shera, too! We’ve already gotten them out of the church, so there’s no need to worry about them!”

That was better news than he ever could have hoped for. For an instant, the hint of a smile played on his face.

Emile gave a thumbs up and flashed his pearly whites with a smile. “Go get ’em, my friend!”

“Hmph... You’ve done well. As a reward, I’ll show you one of my ultimate spells. I was just about to put the final touches on the preparations.”

“What’s this now?”

Diablo stabbed the ground with his staff, sending magic energy through it.

“This marks the thirteenth spot... It is finished.”

“That’s a spell?” Emile asked.

“Indeed. These kinds of magic exist in the world, too...

《Forbidden Spells》, that is.”

“Wh-What? Forbidden Spells!?”

“Heh heh heh...”

—*That’s what they called it in the game, at least!*

This was a spell that utilized the thirteen magic power spots he placed on the ground, making it something similar to any spell that used magic circles. While it was incredibly powerful, it was almost never used since it took so long to set up.

If your opponent were to leave the area of effect while you were still preparing, then it would all be for naught. If you made the perimeter for the spell too wide, then the power of the spell would drop significantly. Because Krebskulm had moved all the way over to the ramparts, Diablo had set up the spell so it would barely graze the city walls. They would just have to forgive him for melting the surface of said ramparts. As things were going, the entire wall would become ammo for Krebskulm to throw at him.

The barrier towers were outside the range of the spell, so everything should be fine, but he was still a little bit uneasy about it. This was the first time Diablo had used this spell since coming here. The effects of spells in this world were different than they were in the game, so he didn't know what would happen until he tried casting it.

He turned his gaze toward Krebskulm. "Succumb to my attack, and be brought to your senses, Klem..."

"《Apocalypse Abyss》!!"

Pillars of light burst forth from the thirteen areas of magic power he had laid down. A fierce tornado appeared within the affected area, the four basic elements raging about within, turning everything it touched to dust.

Flashes of lightning ran about as spouts of magma were thrown into the air. Everything frozen by the magic was shattered in an instant.

This was a spell that possessed attributes of the four basic elements—Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind—and was extremely effective against anything Dark-elemental.

"————!!"

Krebskulm let out a piercing scream that would otherwise be swallowed up by the intense effects of the spell, never to reach the outside—at least, that's how it should have been.

"RAAAAAAARGH!!"

A pained voice reached Diablo's ears.

—*So it leaked out after all...*

The spell was producing an abnormal effect on things outside of its range. Though it should have just barely grazed them, the walls of the city were completely losing their shape.

Emile was at his wit's end. "H-Hey, friend! You're overdoing this!"

"Now's not the time to think about that... We're in danger here as well!"

The ground beneath Diablo started crumbling away. Backing off, Diablo sped across the ground.

"If you do not wish to die, then run!"

“Gahhhh!?” With a scream of his own, Emile took off at a sprint.

Diablo could see the depths of the earth from the cracked ground. Streams of magic energy were rapidly swirling about, with the four great elements whirled together to form a lightning clad tornado that rose up toward the heavens. The remnants of the destroyed church—as well as the ramparts of the city that should have been out of range—were completely caught in the spell.

Almost the entire cemetery of the North District was swallowed up by the earth.

†

A hollow crater had been gouged into the earth. Everything that had once stood here was now reduced to cinders. And in the middle of it all—

There was someone left standing.

Staying at the edge of the crater, Diablo stared in shock at the being in the center of the newly formed crater.

—Please don’t tell me she didn’t take any damage from that, right!?

To tell the truth, he didn’t have much MP to spare after firing off so many spells one after the other.

—Did I not prepare enough before using my ultimate magic...? Should I have made more high-grade MP potions before facing off against this newly awakened Demon Lord!?

Beside Diablo, Emile let out a voice of admiration: “Whoa—h my god... The graveyard is gone...!?”

“You should run while you can. The Demon Lord is still going strong.”

“Wh-What!?”

“ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOARGH!!”

The Demon Lord let out a roar from the center of the crater. The surface of Krebskulm’s body cracked apart, her raised right arm crumbling off as if she were a broken stone statue.

—So it did get her after all!

In all honesty, he was relieved. If he hadn’t done any damage after all that, it was like being told: “Sorcerers can’t win against her.”

A multitude of tiny fractures spread along the surface of Krebskulm’s body. Yet even then, she did not lose her will to continue the fight. She clenched her remaining hand.

Along the edge of the crater, someone else besides Diablo and Emile had appeared.

“KLEEEEEEM!!”

Shera was waving her hands frantically, with Rem alongside her.

Diablo sensed danger; Krebskulm didn't have the memories of when she was Klem, so it was extremely likely she would attack the two girls.

Krebskulm kicked off the ground and Diablo readied Tenma's Staff. With a single bound, Krebskulm leapt in front of Rem and Shera.

"H-Hey, isn't this kind of bad!?" Emile said, his voice frantic. "What's going on here!? That gigantic monster...is supposed to be little Klem!?"

"That's right!"

There was no time to explain the particulars to him; Rem and Shera were already too close. Krebskulm was on a completely different level than a Fallen since weaker magic had no effect on her.

—*What do I do!?*

Rem opened her arms wide.

"...Klem, I'm all right...! Everything is all right now... Please, come back to us!"

Shera took out a biscuit. "Look! Let's eat these together again!"

The Demon Lord Krebskulm raised her left fist.

"Ooooooh..... Ooooooarghhh....."

Diablo could only watch. If the two girls were just a little bit further away, there was a plethora of spells he could use. He hadn't run out of MP just yet.

But one thing was certain: Krebskulm was reacting to the sound of their voices. Would Klem be able to make it back? Diablo fervently made a wish for it to be so.

Krebskulm lowered her enormous hand, holding it out toward Rem and Shera. Her cracked finger brushed against Rem.

"That must have hurt...but it's all right now. I'm fine, so let's go home."

"Here you go, a biscuit! Let's go back to a café again!"

Shera placed a biscuit on the giant's hand. The cracks along Krebskulm's surface rapidly grew in number.

"Ooooooh... Oooohhh....."

Krebskulm's body began to collapse. Like a statue crumbling away due the constant weathering of time, the winged colossus lost her shape as fragments splintered and fell from her being. The wings of light that once stretched toward the sky were no more, and the magic circle that filled the sky had disappeared. The crumbling fragments turned to sand, and were blown away in the wind.

A small girl, with horns and a tail, was holding a biscuit in both hands as she crouched over the ground. She looked at Rem with her purple-colored eyes.

"You're...alive..."

"...Yes, I am. I was saved, thanks to Diablo and Shera." Rem embraced Klem.

"I... I have to say... I'm sorry. I broke my promise with you, Rem," Klem said in a soft voice.

"...Yes."

"When I thought you were killed, the inside of my head went all red..."

"...It's only because you're a Demon Lord; there was nothing that could be done about that. Even if no one else forgives you, *I* will stand by your side."

Shera threw her arms around the two of them. "Me too! I'll always be your friend too!"

"Phew..." Diablo lowered his staff.

Thinking it over, there was now someone else here who knew the whole story of what happened.

"The friendship between beautiful women sure is a wonderful thing, isn't it!" Emile stood next to him, arms folded.

"How are you planning to report back on this?"

"Heh... You prefer not to stand out rather than touting your own accomplishments, right, my friend? No need to worry, I am an ally to all women! I will do nothing to make them cry!"

"You've always been that kind of person, haven't you." It seemed there was no need to worry after all.

Diablo's mind slipped for a moment; it felt like he was on the verge of collapsing. Splotches of blood formed on the ground as it dripped from him bit by bit.

—I did take a good bit of damage back there...but a Demon Lord would never let people see him on the verge of collapse!

Diablo pulled himself together once more.

†

After saying that the townspeople were probably in a panic right about now, Emile and the other Adventurers hopped back into the wagon and left to maintain the public order.

Diablo was informed of everything that happened from Rem, including Alicia's betrayal.

"I see..." He was at a loss for words.

His chest hurt knowing that he had been betrayed again. But Alicia may have had her own circumstances for doing so, just like what happened with Shera. He couldn't just forgive her when he thought of how she almost killed Rem, but he couldn't bring himself

to hate her, either.

Just as he was thinking it was time to head back to the inn, a bright, chipper voice called out to him.

“Heya, Diablo! Good work out there!”

“Hmph...” Diablo snorted. “You and the other Adventurers have played a part in this, too. Do feel honored knowing you have served me well.”

He still couldn’t be honest and just say thanks. Yet Sylvie still gave a sarcastic chuckle.

“Why, thank you oh so very much. I’m delighted I was able to protect the town as well. Now, while we’re on that subject, there’s something I want to ask you...”

She turned her gaze toward Klem, who was holding hands with Rem and Shera. Diablo had a bad feeling about this.

“What is it?”

“She’s the Demon Lord Krebskulm, right?” The smile disappeared from Sylvie’s face.

—*So she saw what happened...*

Sylvie was the leader of the Adventurer’s Guild, and an Adventurer’s primary duty was to “prevent the resurrection of the Demon Lord.” It was impossible to try and hide anything now.

“If that were true, what would you do? I’ll have you know, she has become another one of my possessions.”

He spoke in as coercive a tone as he could muster, trying to push through with his usual Demon Lord role play. Considering how dangerous it would be to fight with him, Diablo was fully expecting Sylvie to come to terms with and approve of the now harmless Klem—but Sylvie still wore the same hardened expression on her face.

“I can’t just let this go; I’m the Guildmaster of the Adventurer’s Guild, after all. You still weren’t able to beat her even after using a spell that annihilated the entire graveyard, right?”

—*And she even saw that..*

“Are you saying you’ll fight with me, Sylvie?”

“I trust you, Diablo, but I don’t think I can trust Krebskulm here after she killed a Paladin.”

“He was a murderer!” Rem shouted.

“If Diablo wasn’t here, the whole town would have been destroyed by Krebskulm. Right now, an entire army of Fallen are advancing on Faltra from the western front. Did you know of that?”

“Wha—!?”

Klem shook her head. “I didn’t call them! Edelgard said she would wait in the forest, but I *didn’t* call them!”

“We have no way of confirming that. In fact, I can only think of

this as the perfect opportunity for you.” Sylvie’s voice was frigid cold.

“You’re a more stubborn person than I thought,” Diablo sighed.

“Gotta be tough on the things that need me to be. I plan to protect the future of the races; that’s what an Adventurer does, right?”

“So, you don’t think Klem is harmless.”

“I’m not convinced, no. I’ll trust anyone the first time, but if they betray me, then never again. Nice and simple, no?”

“Do you truly think you will win against me?”

He did a quick analysis of the difference in their strengths: Sylvie could use spells that caused negative status effects, things like 《Bind》 and 《Silence》. But in the end, she was a Sorcerer, and Diablo possessed the ability to reflect all magic. There was no reason for him to lose.

“I think you have a misunderstanding of how I *really* fight.”

He felt an intense pressure from her, but he couldn’t let himself back down here. His instincts were telling him that making Sylvie his enemy was anything but a good plan.

—If what she just said is supposed to be the blurb she says right before we fight, then I’m already screwed...!

This was like a branching narrative in an adventure game—the kind where picking the wrong choice led to an immediate Bad End. It was a make-or-break situation, and he had no Save or Load options to help him; Klem’s life was truly on the line.

—Hold on a sec... Why are my only two choices “fight Sylvie” or “have Klem killed”? I can actually negotiate in this world; hell, I can even use magic. The choices should be endless!

“Do you hold the life you have in this town as something dear to you?” Diablo asked Klem.

“Hm? O-Of course I do.”

“But due to your little rampage earlier, it seems like you won’t be able to live here anymore.”

“Mmgh... That would be a problem for me...”

“I imagine it would, which is why I, the great and knowledgeable Diablo, shall educate you on a way for you to live in this town and continue eating biscuits. Without being hunted down by other Adventurers, of course.”

“There’s no way something like that could exist!” Sylvie exclaimed, leaning forward.

“You’ve said it yourself, Sylvie.”

“Huh!?”

“Oh, this is great!” Klem said excitedly. “I like the sound of your idea, Diablo! I do want to keep eating biscuits!”

Rem and Shera were in agreement as well.

“...If there really is a way, then please, tell us.”

“Yeah! It would be awful for Adventurers to come after her right after she finally went back to normal!”

Diablo nodded, and pulled a white stone from his pouch—a binding crystal.

“I shall cast 《Enslavement Magic》 on you! If you refuse, then the only option left is to fight!”

“You’re going to make me a *slave*!?” Klem’s eyes went wide.

“That’s right! You shall become a servant of the great Diablo!”

“What!?” Sylvie was in shock. “Isn’t that kind of off the table, Diablo!?”

“You’ve already said it yourself: ‘I’ll trust anyone the first time. If they betray me, then never again.’ Those were your exact words.”

“Y-Yeah, I did say that, but...”

Diablo puffed out his chest with another snort. “Exactly! Then you should believe in my enslavement magic at least once, am I wrong!?”

“Wow, just...wow... Now he’s being all gung-ho about this craziness!”

“Oho? So you’re the kind of person who goes back on their word when things don’t work out for them. How is that for someone who is supposed to lead other people? Can people put their trust in someone like this?”

“Man, never thought I’d be getting a lecture about trust from you of all people...” Sylvie sighed, then looked at Klem. “But would the Demon Lord Krebskulm be able to accept having that magic cast on her?”

Klem was deep in thought when Shera placed a hand on her shoulder.

“It’s all right! I’m supposed to be enslaved to Diablo, too. But once you get used to it, the worst thing about it is the collar kinda gets in the way when you try and wash your neck!”

“What was that!?” Klem’s eyes were almost perfectly round.

Rem nodded. “...It’s true, that is about the only inconvenience you will face, along with getting some curious looks from people around town. Oh, and I’m supposed to be enslaved to Diablo as well, by the way,” she said, touching her own collar.

“Being with Diablo makes you stand out anyway, so it’s pretty much the same thing!” Shera said happily.

“...I can’t say it is the same, but I’m sure it would be better than having Adventurers coming after your life.”

Klem nodded, showing her assent.

“Are you really serious about this, Diablo?” Sylvie grimaced. “Doing that...to a Demon Lord?”

“As long as it satisfies you, then yes,” Diablo said while glaring at her.

“Please believe them, Sylvie!” Shera begged.

“...Going off what you said earlier, you should trust them at least the once. I don’t want to make you out to be the kind of person who goes back on their word, Sylvie,” Rem said, following up with a logical argument.

Klem raised both her hands. “All right, I shall allow it! Put this ‘enslavement collar’ or whatever on me!”

As for Sylvie—

“Guess it’s my loss, Diablo.” With a dry laugh, she admitted defeat.

“Haha... If you’re going to use enslavement magic on Klem, then I have no choice but to trust her... Though I don’t know if that kind of magic would even work on the Demon Lord Krebskulm.”

“Just who do you think I am? I am the Demon Lord, Diablo!”

Klem puffed out her chest. “I shall allow it, so hurry up and use this magic!”

“I shall allow it! Let’s hurry up and use this magic!”

Diablo nodded. He took the white stone in his hand, thinking back to the steps Shera had taken to acquire her Summon the other day.

—*Wait, I have to kiss Klem...?*

Sylvie was watching; Shera, too.

Rem gave him a curious look. “...Do you not understand how to do it? Just chant the spell exactly as I tell you.”

—*All right.*

Diablo resigned himself to what had to be done.



Epilogue

When the great wings of light had spread across Faltra's North District—

Alicia Cristela was in the middle of the large Fallen army. She was surrounded by various monstrosities of all shapes and sizes, who were waiting for the opportunity to advance on Faltra. Edelgard was standing by her side.

“Ohhhh, Lord Krebskulm!!”

As she let out a cry of rapture, the Fallen around her followed suit: “Just, like Alicia, said!”

“I have only done as the Fallen priests had told me. I created a person who was important to Lady Klem, and then arranged for said person to be crushed and taken away from her.”

“No, easy task... Amazing.”

“For a member of the weak races such as myself, this is all I could do...”

“If Demon Lord, resurrected... Everyone, will get, magic power! If hurt, will be healed! Can we, win, against races? Yes, we can!”

The Fallen let out a series of cries and shouts at Edelgard's words.

The wings of light that had appeared in Faltra pierced the heavens. A magic circle filled the sky, and the Fallen rejoiced, claiming it to be proof of the great Demon Lord Krebskulm. Alicia's plan had went off without a hitch. Her greatest ambition was slowly being realized. She waited in silence for the time of joyous tidings to commence.

The Fallen were waiting for the barrier around Faltra to be broken.

If the newly awakened Krebskulm could destroy either the Mage's Association or the barrier towers, the Fallen could invade the town. The city of Faltra would become a place of celebration for the true rebirth of the Demon Lord.

There were a great number of Fallen who had accepted Edelgard's proposal, and not only the one hundred followers from her faction: Fallen from the Vahl faction were there; even Eulerex appeared as well.

The wings of light had appeared as a magic circle indicative of the Demon Lord was spread across the sky.

When would the barrier finally shatter...!?

The time of joyous tidings—
—never came.

Everything went silent.

As soon as Edelgard whispered that Krebskulm's presence had shrunk, Alicia knew her plan had been a failure.

Eulerex was the first to approach them: "What is the meaning of this? Both the wings of light and the magic circle of Lord Krebskulm have disappeared." The enormous, one-horned owl spoke harshly, his voice dripping with condemnation.

The other Fallen began to throw blame onto Edelgard and Alicia. The members of the Vahl faction, however, only cared about killing the races, and had already returned to the forest. But perhaps because of the grudge they bore from the fight with Diablo the other day, the Eulerex faction was not so easily pacified.

"I shall have you take responsibility for wasting the time of so many Fallen on this fool's errand."

The other Fallen chanted their assent, raising their fists in the air.

Though there were some Fallen from Edelgard's faction who came to her defense, others started to voice their support for Eulerex instead. But that was to be expected; this would mark the second time Edelgard had mobilized troops and failed. They had never made it past the Bridge of Ulug.

Not only that, but Alicia was also responsible for the failure of this plan. And yet, being killed in retaliation by the Fallen for her failure, without destroying the races... It was all too pointless for her to bear. Alicia was filled with regret.

"On, my signal... Run. To town," Edelgard whispered into her ear. "...!?"

The voices of the arguing Fallen grew louder. They were much more savage and vicious compared to the other races, which was why they lived so far apart from one another. It was all for the purpose of never making contact with other Fallen face-to-face. It wouldn't take long for these arguments to turn into a bloodbath.

The Fallen bared their fangs at Alicia, the Human who was the source of their failure today, when Edelgard swung her spear around in a grand revolution.

"《Swing Spike》!!"

She mowed down the encroaching Fallen using a sudden Martial Art; the hostilities had commenced.

Their comrades suddenly taken down, members from the Eulerex faction came after Edelgard. It was then Edelgard's most trusted steed came barreling through the Fallen, scattering them left and right.

Being a 《Grand Dragon》, it was a monster possessing a durable body that could outrun any monster on land; no Fallen could keep up with it.

“Run!”

At Edelgard's command, Alicia took off running, never looking behind her. The fangs of a Fallen could sever her torso from the rest of her body at any moment; if that was the case, then the only thing she could do was trust Edelgard.

If her death would have become the cornerstone needed for the destruction of the races, then she was fine with being killed—but falling prey to the Fallen taking out their frustrations on her would be nothing more than merely dying in vain—

An impact struck her side. It felt like her innards were being crushed.

—*Am I dead!?*

The source of the shock was an arm, wrapped around her waist. It was Edelgard, blood flowing steadily from her head.

“What!? They got you, Lady Edelgard!?”

“No, talking... You, will bite...tongue...”

“I have an adequate understanding of horsemanship. I would never make an amateur mistake like that.”

As said, she was perfectly capable of speaking on horseback without injuring herself.

Edelgard nodded. “Then... Leave, to you.”

After Edelgard pulled Alicia up onto the grand dragon so that she was straddling it, Edelgard collapsed in a heap. If the grand dragon hadn't caught Edelgard with one of its hands, she would have fallen off.

“Lady Edelgard!?”

Alicia desperately grasped at the reins. They were covered in countless thorny spikes, so despite her gloves, a sharp pain assaulted her. Blood from Alicia's hands smeared over Edelgard as Alicia tried to support her.

They pulled away from the pursuing Fallen. The grand dragon was abnormally fast as they crossed over the Bridge of Ulug which, strangely enough, had no guards present. They had most probably received orders to retreat in the face of the Fallen hordes.

Approaching Faltra, Alicia bit her lip. She wanted to destroy the races, and to have the beautiful Fallen rule the world—

But right now, with every fiber of her being, Alicia wanted to save Edelgard.

To be continued...

Afterword

Thank you for reading the third volume of “How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord”!

I’m the author, Yukiya Murasaki.

In this volume, the previously sealed away Demon Lord Krebskulm has been resurrected. Diablo had been all gung-ho about defeating them...but Krebskulm turns out to be a little girl. No man can win against that. In the end, after a series of events, it turns into a battle of Demon Lord vs. Demon Lord.

(The way Diablo destroyed the city walls was mentioned in another series with the same world view, too.)

Cafés have made an appearance in this volume, and I also tried writing about some of the sweets found in this world. Not only that, but I finally put in a scene with “enslavement magic,” since Diablo was asleep for that in the first volume.

We’ve come to a close on one part of the story, so I’m thinking I’d like to focus on Alicia and Edelgard’s plot line in the next volume, and maybe get in some new developments as well. I’m planning on getting that out starting at the beginning of new year.

Special thanks—

Tsurusaki Takahiro, thank you for the wonderful illustrations. It’s pretty fun trying to push our limits like this!

To Ooishi, the designer at Afterglow, thank you once again!

To my editor, Shouji, my deepest gratitude for allowing me so much freedom that I almost worry I’m too carefree when writing. (Also, looking forward to the next episode of your radio talk show.)

Thanks to all the staff at the Kodansha Light Novel Editing Department, and to the family and friends who supported me.

And for all of you who have read this, I can only offer you my utmost gratitude. Thank you all very much!

Yukiya Murasaki









HOW
NOT TO
SUMMON
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by Yukiya Murasaki

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